Sports Illustrated

NFL COMBINE: NOW WHO'S THE TOP PICK?

UNSAFE AT HOME
In Venezuela, Baseball Is a Dangerous Game
by E.M. SWIFT

# It's March!
## Let The Madness Begin

**Dee Brown**
The No. 1 Attraction In College Hoops...

...And 5 Guys Who Might Stop Him

RAYMOND FELTON
N. CAROLINA

RAJON RONDO
KENTUCKY

JARRETT JACK
GEORGIA TECH

DARREN BROOKS
S. ILLINOIS

EDDIE BASDEN
CHARLOTTE

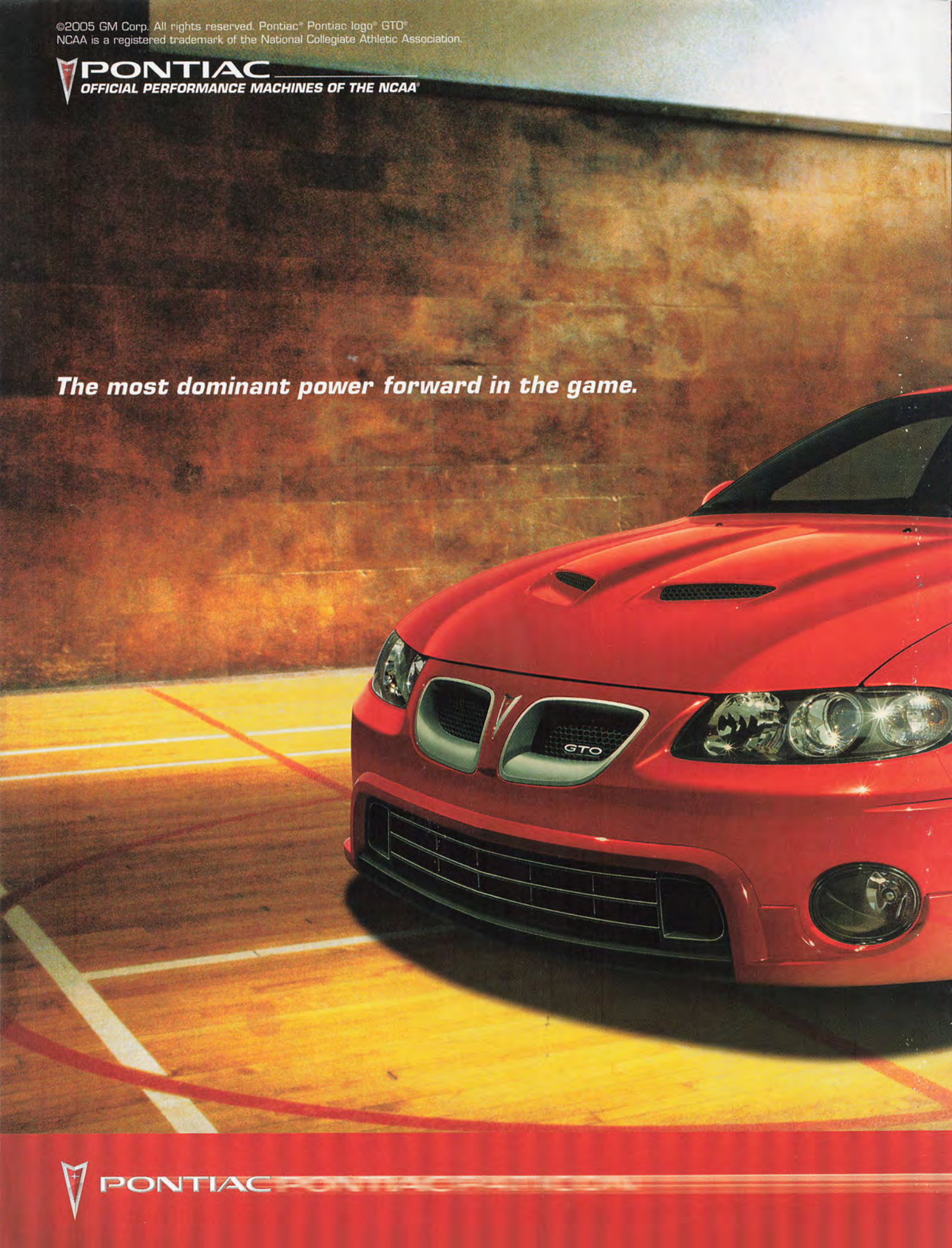
BY SETH DAVIS

MARCH 7, 2005 www.SI.com | AOL Keyword: Sports Illustrated

©2005 GM Corp. All rights reserved. Pontiac® Pontiac logo® GTO®
NCAA is a registered trademark of the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

PONTIAC
OFFICIAL PERFORMANCE MACHINES OF THE NCAA®

***The most dominant power forward in the game.***




PONTIAC

*The 2005 GTO. 400-hp V8, 0-60 in 4.7 seconds, hood scoops, dual exhaust, and available 18" wheels. Sport Appearance Package shown.*

ACTION

© 2005 R.J. REYNOLDS TOBACCO CO.

# New CAMEL

## TURKISH BLENDS

*Now With More Turkish* **Mellower** *Than Ever!*

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking By Pregnant Women May Result in Fetal Injury, Premature Birth, And Low Birth Weight.

TURKISH GOLD: 10 mg. "tar", 0.8 mg. nicotine, TURKISH ROYAL: 13 mg. "tar", 1.1 mg. nicotine, TURKISH JADE: 17 mg. "tar", 1.2 mg. nicotine, av. per cigarette by FTC method. For more product information, visit www.rjrt.com.

Sports Illustrated
MARCH 7, 2005
VOLUME 102, NO. 10

# The Lineup

COLLEGE BASKETBALL
**36 We Love to Watch**
As March Madness begins, one player stands out as the star of the show: Illinois's Dee Brown
**by Grant Wahl**

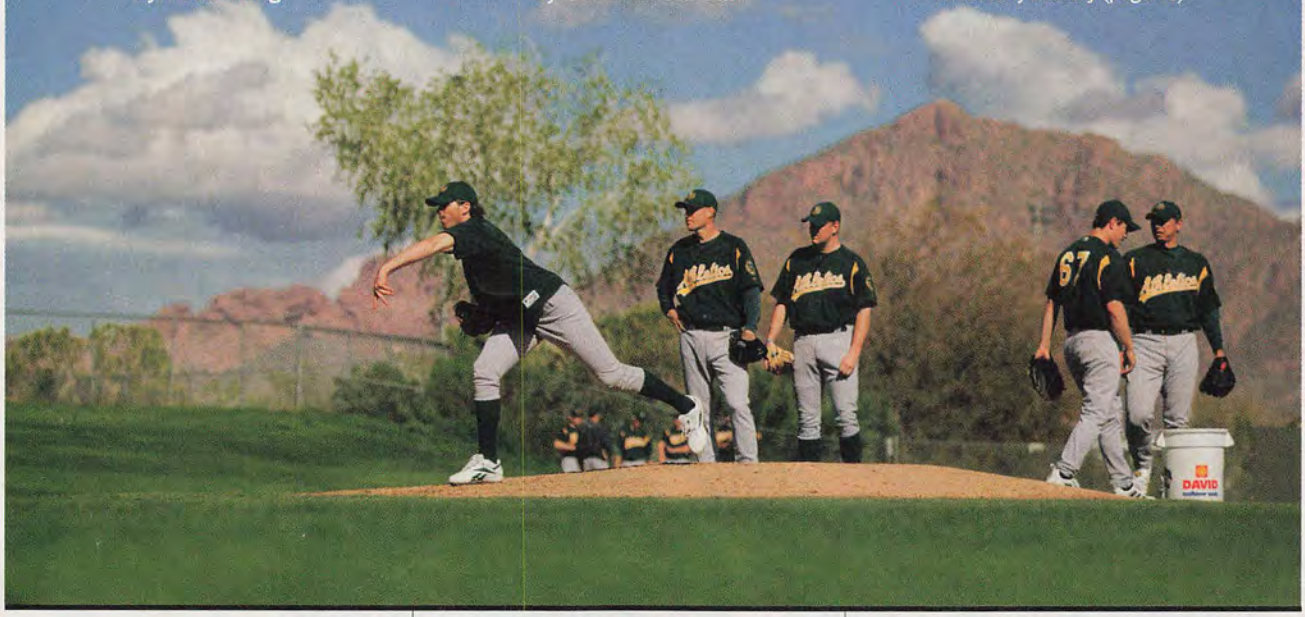
PRO FOOTBALL
**42 The No. 1 Question**
Who will the 49ers take first in the draft? SI slots the top four players at the scouting combine
**by Peter King**

BASEBALL
**48 A Winning Hand?**
In discarding a pair of aces, Oakland A's G.M. Billy Beane took his boldest gamble yet
**by Daniel G. Habib**

PRO BASKETBALL
**52 Executive Decision**
Kevin McHale has taken charge of his moribund T-Wolves. Risky move.
**by Jack McCallum**

BASEBALL
**56 Unsafe at Home**
Despite their success in the major leagues, Venezuela's *beisbol* stars are crime targets
**by E.M. Swift**

**SPRING FLING** At training camp in Arizona, A's ace Barry Zito dusts off his lefty delivery (page 48).



## Departments

**4 Leading Off**
**12 Contributors**
**15 Letters**
**17 Air and Space**
Andy Van Slyke has some advice for his old teammate Barry Bonds: Look in the mirror **by Steve Rushin**
**18 Scorecard**
- NBA trade deadline madness
- John Chaney finally crosses line
- Jose Canseco, literary lion

**26 Faces in the Crowd**
**29 Players**
**70 The Life of Reilly**
You asked for it: an update on many of the little guys I've written about in 20 years at SI **by Rick Reilly**

## Inside...

**66 College Basketball**
- Louisville primed for NCAA run

**68 The NBA**
- Magic's Howard justifies top pick
- Sonics, Allen can't make a deal

## Cover

PHOTOGRAPH BY AL TIELEMANS

INSET PHOTOS: Manny Millan (Felton, Rondo); David E. Klutho (Jack); Steve Jahnke/The Southern/AP (Brooks); Brett Hansbauer/US Presswire (Basden)

## SI Extra

To sign up for SPORTS ILLUSTRATED's free subscriber-only e-mail newsletter, go to sicustomerservice.com/siextra.

Who's in, out, on the bubble? Up-to-the-minute college hoops scoop, including SI.com's bracket watch, power rankings and complete coverage of conference tournament week, at SI.com/basketball/ncaa. SI.com

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (ISSN 0038-822X) is published weekly, with an extra issue in February and two issues combined in July and at year end, by Time Inc. Principal Office: Time & Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, NY 10020-1393. Ann Moore, Chairman, CEO; Richard Atkinson, Executive Vice President. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40110178. Return undeliverable Canada Addresses to: Postal Stn A, PO Box 4322, Toronto, ON, M5W 3G9. GST #122781974RT. U.S. subscription: $81.95 for 55 issues. SUBSCRIBERS: If the postal service alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within two years. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, Post Office Box 30602, Tampa, FL 33630-0602, MAILING LIST: We make a portion of our mailing list available to reputable firms. If you would prefer that we not include your name, please call or write us. ©2005 TIME INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. SPORTS ILLUSTRATED IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF TIME INC.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUBSCRIPTIONS: For 24/7 service, please use our website: www.si.com/customerservice. You can also call 1-800-528-5000 or write to SI at P.O. Box 30602, Tampa, FL 33630-0602.

BRAD MANGIN

# Leading Off

## Overhead Smash

Andre Agassi and Roger Federer (blue shirt) warmed up for the Dubai tennis championships (which Federer won) with a little back and forth (but not too far back) on the helipad for the Burj Al Arab hotel on Feb. 22. This temporary court was 692 feet off the ground, which makes for a very long drop shot (left).

*Photographs by* Mike Hewitt/Getty Images

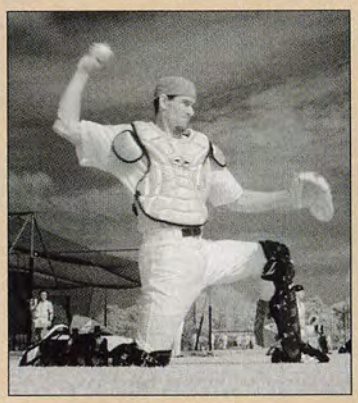
For daily Web-only Leading Off galleries, go to **SI.com/scorecard**.

## Leading Off

# Moon Shot

The setting is St. Petersburg, but the look is eerily lunar as the Devil Rays' catchers shag pop-ups during spring training. The otherworldly effect was achieved by creating an infrared setting on a digital camera.

*Photographs by*
Chuck Solomon



340

OBERSTDORF

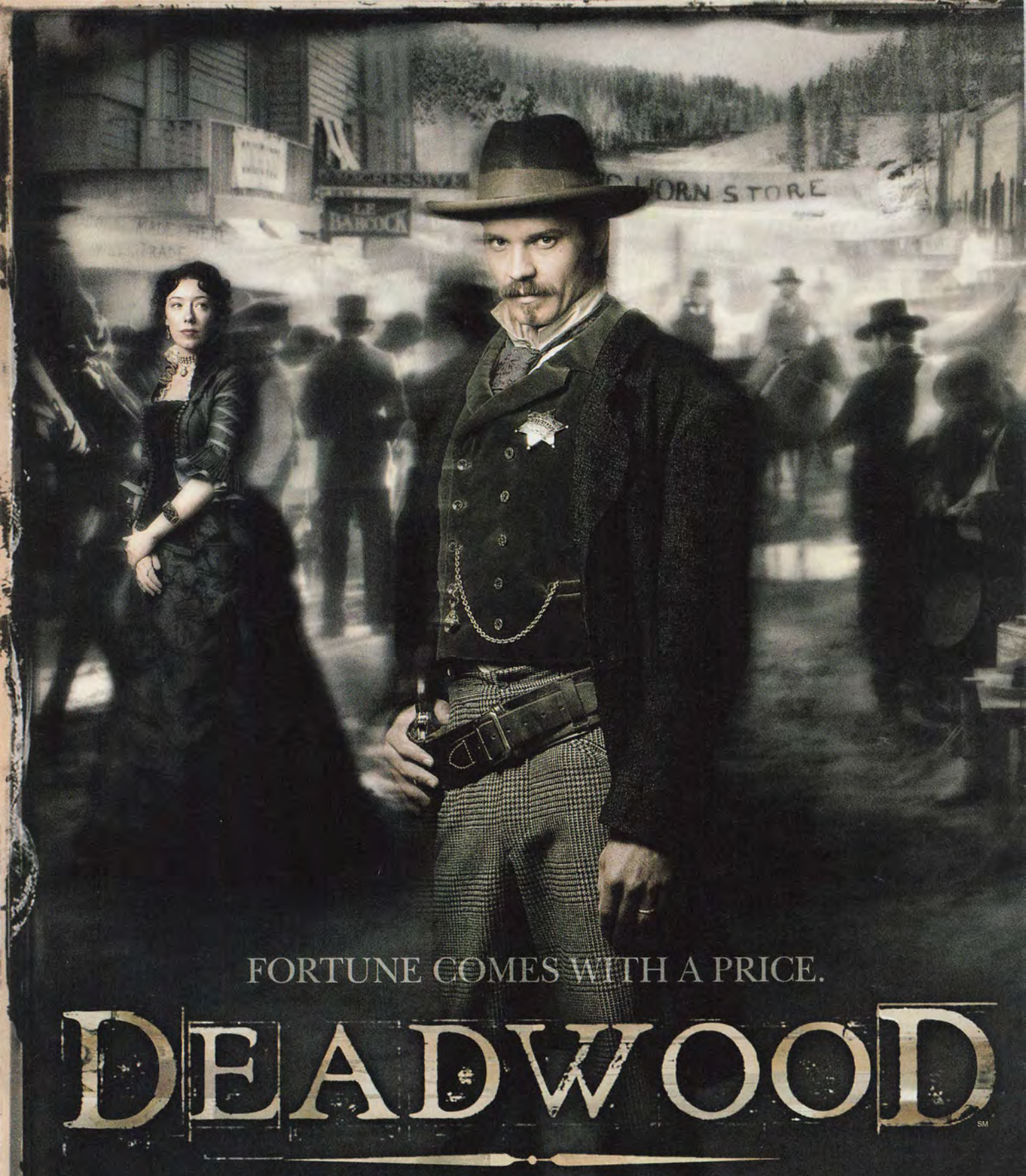
## Leading Off

# Jump Start

Janne Ahonen of Finland nails his takeoff in the large hill ski jump final at the Nordic World Championships in Oberstdorf, Germany, last Friday. Ahonen finished in first place.

*Photograph by*
Kai Pfaffenbach/Reuters

AGENCE ZOOM/GETTY IMAGES




FORTUNE COMES WITH A PRICE.

# DEADWOOD℠

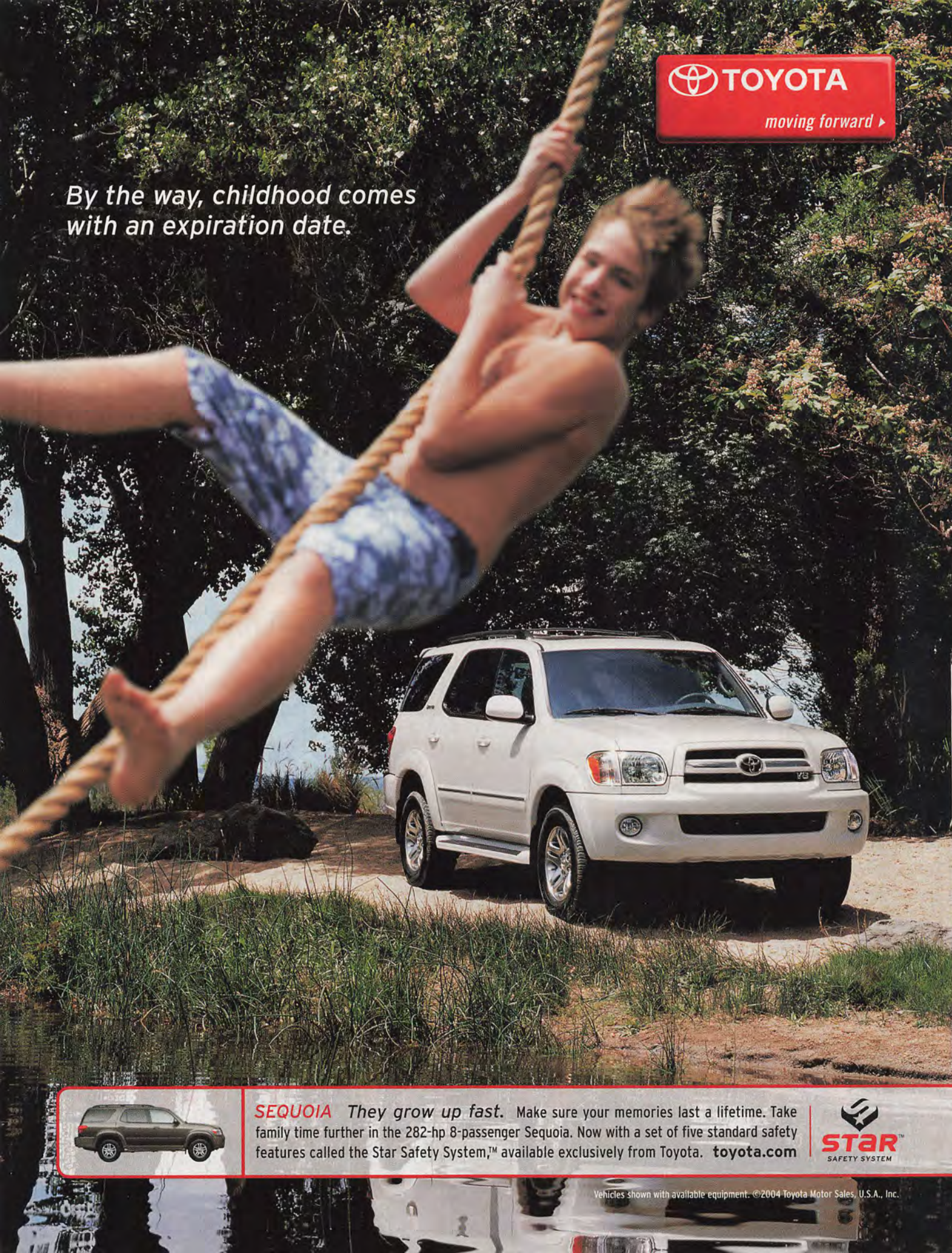
THE ACCLAIMED SERIES RETURNS

SUNDAY, MARCH 6 AT 9PM/8C

HBO®

DEADWOOD: THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON. NOW AVAILABLE ON DVD.

©2005 Home Box Office, Inc. All rights reserved. HBO® and Deadwood℠ are service marks of Home Box Office, Inc.


TOYOTA
moving forward
By the way, childhood comes with an expiration date.
SEQUOIA They grow up fast. Make sure your memories last a lifetime. Take family time further in the 282-hp 8-passenger Sequoia. Now with a set of five standard safety features called the Star Safety System,™ available exclusively from Toyota. toyota.com
STAR™ SAFETY SYSTEM
Vehicles shown with available equipment. ©2004 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

# "Restore Works!"

Every engine wears out as a result of friction during normal driving. Friction causes wear of the cylinder walls which leads to substantial compression loss over time. Your vehicle's engine has less power, sluggish acceleration, and burns more oil.

**RESTORE Engine Restorer and Lubricant** is a unique engine additive that repairs those worn out areas of the cylinder wall. RESTORE is the only product with the technologically advanced CSL formulation that actually fills in and seals micro-leaks on the cylinder walls. The result is increased engine compression and more engine power. Your vehicle will have better performance by restoring and balancing the compression across all cylinders. Independent lab tests prove that RESTORE really works to increase cylinder compression as shown in the graphs below.

Available at all major discount stores and automotive retailers.

## SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

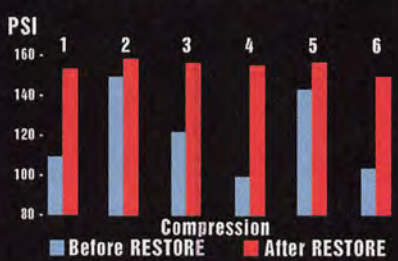
*"A few days ago I added RESTORE to my 1990 VW Jetta with over 127,000 miles on it. I just wanted to tell you that it only took a few miles before I noticed a marked improvement in my car's performance. I noticed a drastic improvement on pick-up and it idled much smoother. It feels like a new car again! Thank you for a great product!"* - T.S., Anaheim, CA

*"I used your product RESTORE for the first time in May of this year. The vehicle had an engine that wouldn't stay running because 3 of the 8 cylinders had horrible compression. After using RESTORE, the engine idles smoothly and hardly smokes anymore. I am so impressed with the results, that I purchased a can for every vehicle I own. Thank you for this excellent product!"* - G.S., Henneker, NH

*"I want to tell you of my complete satisfaction with your product. I drive a 1986 Chevrolet S-10 pickup with over 200,000 miles on it. I have used RESTORE for well over 100,000 miles of those 200,000 miles and I have had no engine problems. The oil is clean after every oil change and the engine is as strong today as it was in 1986. No smoke, no leaks, and at 70 mph I still get over 20 miles per gallon. I see a lot of different oil additives advertised, but your product works for me every mile I drive. Thanks and keep up the great work!"* - C.G., Topeka, KS

**Cylinders**
(1988 Chevrolet 4-cylinder with 242,104 miles)

**Cylinders**
(1989 Dodge V-6 with 120,903 miles)




**Cylinders**
(1976 Cadillac V-8 with 111,937 miles)

For more information please visit our website at: **www.RestoreUSA.com**

# The Gift of Reilly *by* Gary Smith

WHEN YOU'RE born into an Irish-Catholic family of nine children, you're born to have your orbs busted. And so what could I do, as Rick Reilly won one National Sportswriter of the Year Award after another, but brace and cringe when I went home for the holidays? "But . . . but I've won a few awards," I'd splutter, "and besides, there's no way to compare my four long stories a year to his 51 columns." By 2003, when he was crowned for the eighth year, I was all out of splutter.

And then, last spring, an amazing thing occurred. No, not *that*. Rick called and asked if I'd present his ninth award to him at the national sportscasters and sportswriters banquet in Salisbury, N.C. . . . on the same day my family would be gathering from all over the East Coast for my mom's 80th birthday. In North Carolina.

"Sure, I'd *love* to," I assured Rick. He couldn't see my eyeballs glint.

"Don't you think you should warn him?" my sisters kept asking as I hatched my plot. "Rick doesn't even know us. Won't he get mad?"

"No," I kept insisting. "You gotta know Rick. When we covered the '92 Olympics in Barcelona, we ended up in a nightclub at 3 a.m., dancing around a ceremonial pile of everything we'd peeled off—shirts, shoes, socks, watches, wallets, passports. He'll go along with anything."

I strode in front of America's finest quills and tonsils that night in Salisbury. I began to explain how my siblings had finally accepted that I'd never win the damn award, when suddenly, from the back of the hall, they all stormed the podium brandishing protest banners. AWARD HOG screamed one. They pulled a black hood over Rick's head and bound him with a rope.

"We're holding Rick hostage until my brother gets the award!" cried my sister Sue. It was all going perfectly. "Unless. . . ."

Uh-oh. . . .

Suddenly she was offering him two alternative conditions for his release. If Rick agreed to become a member of our family and change his column's name to THE LIFE OF SMITTY, he'd be freed to accept the award, and my disgraced siblings would finally have a brother who was king.

Oh, brother. . . .

Maybe it was Rick's big heart. Maybe he'd never been hog-tied and hooded in front of a couple of hundred people and Joe Garagiola. Or maybe it was my sisters Chris and Janine grabbing his head and jerking it up and down. He nodded yes.

The crowd loved it. When the hood came off, Rick blinked . . . then beamed . . .

**HIS BACK PAGES** The protesting Smith (above) had a point: Reilly has won five of the last six sportswriter of the year awards and 10 since '91.

then took the mike and flayed us all. He rose to the moment, jumped in with both feet and both ventricles, just as he does on the last page of SI every week. Like when he puked flying in an F-14 for a column in 1999, and when he got trashed by an 87-year-old in a 50-yard swimming race for a column in 2003, and when he mangled six cars trying to soar over them in a monster truck that same year. I looked around the room. At least I wasn't alone. Heart, guts and talent merged had made bridesmaids of us all.

Eight weeks from now, in Salisbury, Rick will receive his 10th sportswriter of the year award. He must need a presenter. I can't, for the life of me, figure out why he hasn't called. □

SIMON BRUTY (REILLY): COURTESY NATIONAL SPORTSCASTERS & SPORTWRITERS ASSOCIATION



**Founder:** Henry R. Luce 1898–1967
**Editor-in-Chief:** Norman Pearlstine **Editorial Director:** John Huey
**Corporate Editor:** Isolde Motley

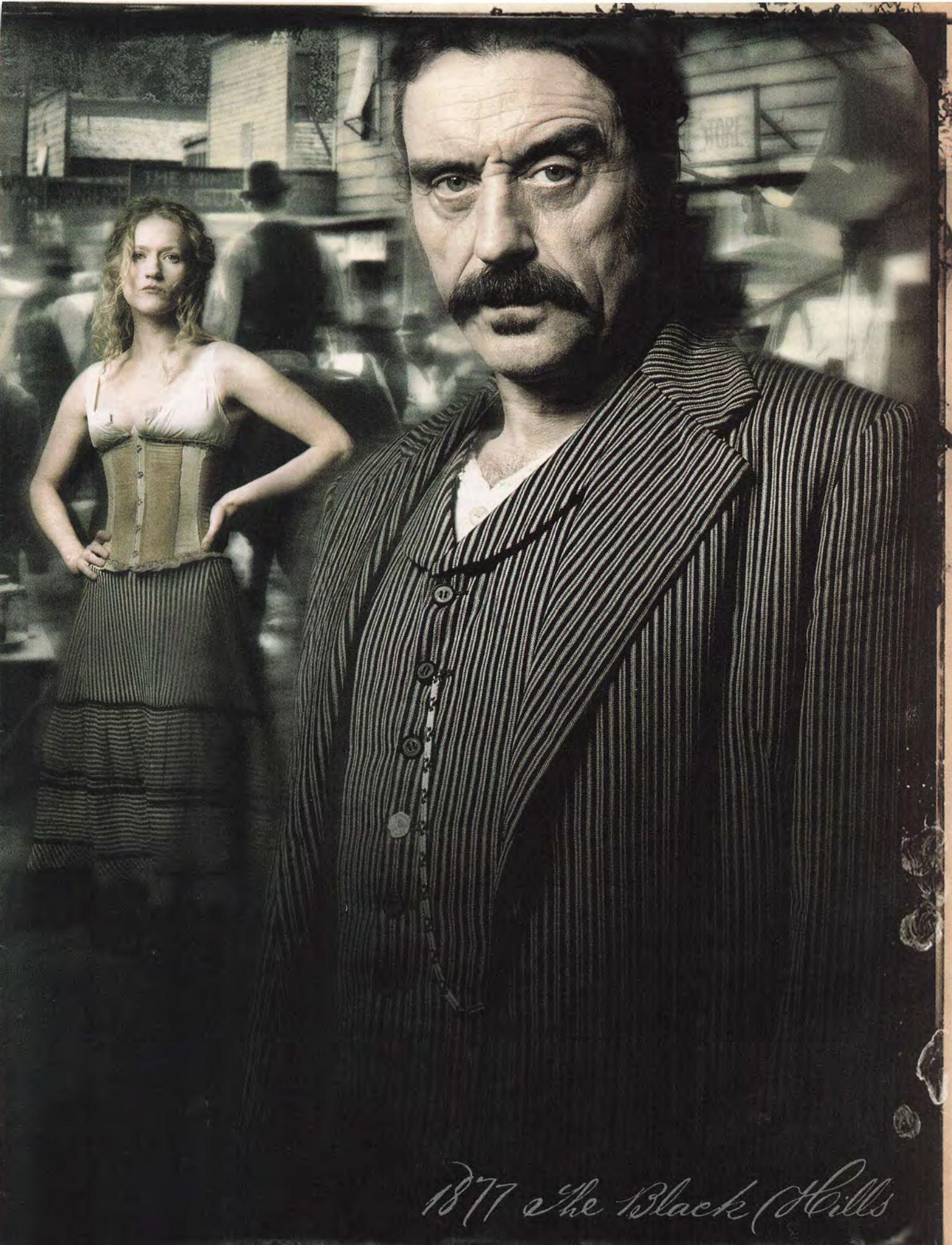
**Chairman, CEO:** Ann S. Moore
**Executive Vice Presidents:** Richard Atkinson, Jack Haire, Michael J. Klingensmith, Nora P. McAniff, John Squires

**Sports Illustrated**

**Managing Editor:** Terry McDonell
**Deputy Managing Editor:** David Bauer
**Executive Editors:** Michael Bevans, Rob Fleder, Charlie Leerhsen
**Assistant Managing Editors:** James P. Herre (GOLF PLUS), Roy S. Johnson (SPECIAL PROJECTS), Craig Neff, Bob Roe, Sandra Wright Rosenbush (SI PRESENTS)
**Editor-at-Large:** Karl Taro Greenfeld
**Creative Director:** Steven Hoffman
**Director of Photography:** Steve Fine
**Managing Editor, SI.com:** Paul Fichtenbaum
**Senior Editor, Chief of Reporters:** Richard Demak
**Senior Editors:** Larry Burke, Bobby Clay, Dick Friedman, Mark Godich, Jim Gorant (GOLF PLUS), Hank Hersch, Christopher Hunt (ARTICLES), Stefanie Kaufman (OPERATIONS), Gregory Kelly, Kostya P. Kennedy, Mark Mravic, Richard O'Brien, Christian Stone
**Art Directors:** Christopher Hercik, Edward P. Truscio
**Art Director, SI Presents:** Craig Gartner
**Copy Chief:** Gabe Miller
**Director of Technology:** Anne P. Jackley
**Director of Operations:** Robert Kanell
**Deputy Art Directors:** Steven Charny, Linda Root
**Edit Finance Manager:** Brian Clavell
**Senior Contributing Writer:** Frank Deford
**Senior Writers:** Kelli Anderson, Michael Bamberger, Michael Farber, John Garrity, Richard Hoffer, Peter King, Tim Layden, Franz Lidz, Jack McCallum, J. Austin Murphy, S.L. Price, Rick Reilly, Steve Rushin, Alan Shipnuck, Michael Silver, Gary Smith, E.M. Swift, Phil Taylor, Ian Thomsen, Gary Van Sickle, Tom Verducci, Grant Wahl, L. Jon Wertheim, Alexander Wolff, Paul Zimmerman
**Associate Editors:** Mark Bechtel, Richard Deitsch, Albert Lin, Lester Munson, David Sabino (STATISTICS), B.J. Schecter, Don Yaeger
**Staff Writers:** Lars Anderson, Chris Ballard, Stephen Cannella, Brian Cazeneuve, Jeffri Chadiha, Seth Davis, George Dohrmann, Josh Elliott, Daniel G. Habib, Kelley King
**Photography Editor:** James K. Colton
**Deputy Photography Editors:** Maureen Cavanagh, George G. Washington
**Photography:** Nina Prado (OPERATIONS MANAGER); Porter Binks, Miriam Marseu, Marguerite Schropp Lucarelli, Jeffrey Weig (ASSOCIATE EDITORS); Linda Bonenfant, Claire Bourgeois, Heather Brown, Don Delliquanti, Nate Gordon, Kari Stein (ASSISTANT EDITORS); Beth A. Dalatri (TRAFFIC); Daniel Jimenez, Mei Levine, Carlos Miguel Saavedra
**Senior Staff Photographer, Special Projects:** Heinz Kluetmeier
**Photographers:** Robert Beck, John Biever, Simon Bruty, Bill Eppridge, Bill Frakes, John Iacono, Walter Iooss Jr., Lynn Johnson, David E. Klutho, Bob Martin, John W. McDonough, Manny Millan, Peter Read Miller, Bob Rosato, Jeffery A. Salter, Chuck Solomon, Damian Strohmeyer, Al Tielemans
**Deputy Chief of Reporters:** Lawrence Mondi
**Writer-Reporters:** Trisha Lucey Blackmar (DEPUTY, SPECIAL PROJECTS); Mark Beech, Albert Chen, Rick Lipsey, Luis Fernando Llosa, Gene Menez, Melissa Segura, Bill Syken, Andrea Woo, Yi-Wyn Yen
**Reporters:** Connie Aitcheson, Lisa Altobelli, Kelvin C. Bias, Farrell Evans, Chris Mannix, Linda-Ann Marsch, Julia Morrill, Elizabeth Newman, Damian F. Slattery
**Art Department:** Joanna Farrimond, Catherine Gillespie, Eric Marquard, Karen Meneghin, Jodi L. Napolitani (ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS); Nell Jamieson (ASSISTANT DIRECTOR); Judie F. King (DESIGNER); Kim Impastato (ASSISTANT)
**Copy Desk:** Pamela Ann Roberts (DEPUTY, SPECIAL PROJECTS); Richard McAdams, Pearl Amy Sverdlin (DEPUTIES); Rich Donnelly, Robert G. Dunn, Jill Jaroff, A. Denis Johnston, Kevin Kerr, Katherine Pradt, Nancy Ramsey, Anthony Scheitinger, John M. Shostrom (COPY EDITORS); Bryan Byers, Helen Wilson (EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS); Robert Emrich, Brenda D. Le Maitre (COPY ASSISTANTS)
**Technology:** Philip Jache, Heloisa Zero (DEPUTIES); Alvin Lee, Samuel Greenfield (MANAGERS); David Matinho (ASSISTANT MANAGER); John Arbucci, Michael Kiser (SENIOR SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATORS); James Anderson, Joseph Babich, Jeffrey Cecilio, Ginny Gilroy, Karen Musmanno, Hee Poon, Josset Rawle, Ronald Taylor, Mike Wolf
**Operations:** Kerith Foley, Lora Toussaint (ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS); Luisa Durante, Nicole Indri Galliano (MANAGERS); Tracy Carolonza, Erin Clark, Mitch Getz, Keith Kamel, Nicole Marousek, Abigail Pellegrino, Jennifer Putrelo, Don Stone (ASSISTANT MANAGERS); Simon Yang
**Imaging:** Geoffrey A. Michaud (DIRECTOR); Robert M. Thompson (MANAGER); Ted Menzies (MANAGER, PICTURE COLLECTION); Dan Larkin, Mary Morel (ASSISTANT MANAGERS); Robert J. Eckstein, William Y. Lew, Brian Mai, Charles Maxwell, Annmarie Modugno-Avila, Lorenzo P. Pace, Clara Renauro, Donald Schaedtler, Hai Tan, Sandra Vallejos, William Von Gonten
**News Bureau:** Douglas F. Goodman (MANAGER); Angel Reyes (DEPUTY); Alex Blanco
**Library:** Joy Birdsong (MANAGER); Natasha Simon, Helen Stauder, Linda Ann Wachtel
**Special Contributors:** Walter Bingham, Robert H. Boyle, John Ed Bradley, Robert W. Creamer, Martin F. Dardis, Ron Fimrite, Jerry Kirshenbaum, Neil Leifer, Jeff MacGregor, Pierre McGuire, Merrell Noden, Bill Scheft, John Schulian
**SI.com:** Aimee Crawford, Adam Levine (ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITORS); Dan George (SUPERVISING PRODUCER); Ryan Hunt, James Quintong (SENIOR PRODUCERS); Paul Forrester, Jonah Freedman, John Hollinger, Lonny Krasnow, Jacob Luft, Mike McAllister, Kristin Morse, Andrew Perloff, Jimmy Traina, Luke Winn (PRODUCERS); Drew Packham, Jody Woodman, Scott Wraight (ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS); Don Banks, Marty Burns, John Donovan (SENIOR WRITERS); Stewart Mandel, Pete McEntegart (STAFF WRITERS); Chris Heine (DESIGN DIRECTOR); Randall Grant (SENIOR MULTIMEDIA DESIGNER); Jeff Diecks (DIRECTOR, OPERATIONS); Paul Henshaw (PRODUCTION EDITOR); Mike McLeod (PROJECT MANAGER)
**Administration:** Joan Rosinsky, Jim Clements, Barbara Fox, Elizabeth Surgil, Sarah Thurmond
**Editorial Business Office:** Julee Luu (DEPUTY); Lena Elguindi (ASSISTANT FINANCIAL MANAGER); Delia Donovan, Patricia Emptage, Caroline Seo
**Letters:** Linda Verigan (DIRECTOR); Liz Greco, Margaret Terry

**President:** John Squires
**Publisher:** David S. Morris
**Vice President, General Manager:** Oliver Knowlton
**Vice President, Communications:** Art Berke
**Consumer Marketing Director:** Jonathan Shar
**Vice President, Chief Marketing Officer:** Jeff Price
**Associate Publisher:** Richard A. Raskopf
**Financial Director:** Susan Roberson
**President, SI.com:** Gordon N. McLeod
**Legal:** Judith R. Margolin

**Time Inc.**
**Development Editor:** Susan Casey
**Editors-at-Large:** Donald L. Barlett, Angelo Figueroa, James B. Steele
**Editorial Technology:** Paul Zazzera (CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER); Scott Haglund, Mitchell Klaif (VICE PRESIDENTS); Bob Alpaugh, Agatha Cutrone, Renee Guttmann Stark (SR. DIRECTORS)


1877 The Black Hills

## Dyna-Might?

I could not help but notice that four different members of the New England Patriots have appeared on three of the last four SI covers—Tedy Bruschi (Jan. 24), Tom Brady (Feb. 7) and Rodney Harrison and Mike Vrabel (Feb. 14)—as they earned their third championship in the last four years. Coincidence? I think not.

*Cary McNally*
*Glendale, Ariz.*

SCHUSS! U.S. Skiers Make Downhill History
Sports Illustrated
Crowd Pleaser
SUPER BOWL XXXIX
Down Pat
The New England Patriots Celebrate Their Third Championship in Four Years

"Fancy Footwork" is the caption for Heinz Kluetmeier's great photograph of Patriot Deion Branch in *Three-Ring Circus* (Feb. 14). Indeed, Branch's feet are inbounds after he makes the reception, but check out the line judge's eyes. We love to criticize players and refs in all of sports, but this photo shows that the official, Mark Steinkerchner, is in the perfect place to make the call.

*Polly MacMullen, Brentwood, N.H.*

Michael Silver writes, "Because they do not . . . beat their chests in triumph, the New England Patriots are forever being cast as commonplace champions," then goes on to compare them to milk shakes and the Beach Boys. A photo that ran with the story shows Vrabel helping Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb to his feet, but flip back to LEADING OFF and there's Vrabel mocking Terrell Owens in a celebratory dance—and on the previous spread there's David Givens flexing his muscles in celebration after a touchdown. The Patriots are the best team in professional football, but they're not choirboys. These photos prove they're just as flashy and gaudy as any other NFL team.

*Jonathan Sexton, Montgomery, Ala.*

The Patriots answered the dynasty question with a resounding *Yes* on Super Sunday. But where will Bill Belichick be without both of his genius coordinators—Charlie Weis and Romeo Crennel—who have gone on to other jobs? Next season is going to be a time for the coach to put all the critics to rest.

*Zach Schneider, Duluth*

## That Time of Year

This week I opened my mailbox to once again find the February issue that I dread to see, let alone read. I try not to look, but I can't help it: the graphic pictures, the public exposure, the sordid details of yet another Philadelphia Eagles playoff loss.

*Mitch Hawbaker*
*Mercersburg, Pa.*

## Giving Receiver

Rick Reilly shows that Deion Branch, even if he had not been the Super Bowl MVP, was a winner before the opening kickoff (LIFE OF REILLY, Feb. 14). Branch understands that no matter who you are or what you do, you're only as good as the people you have around you.

*Vince Foti, Oneonta, N.Y.*

If I had known before the Super Bowl about Branch's thank-you calls to all the coaches who helped him get there, I might have found myself actually cheering for him over my beloved Eagles. Thank you, Deion (and Rick), for showing my children that good guys do win and that manners do count. While I hope our Eagles win the big game next year, I wish Branch all the success and happiness that life has to offer.

*Lisa Wilson, Wycombe, Pa.*

Appreciation could be infectious. Maybe next year Terrell Owens will hold up a sign thanking his grade school teacher for giving him the chance to play with markers. You never know.

*Max Fitzgerald, Evanston, Ill.*

## Enchanted April

In your Feb. 14 SCORECARD you say that Marlin Carlos Delgado will pay zero state income tax if he leaves Florida, which has no income tax, to play in a state that does. This is so, you report, because "a clause in his contract would require his next team to foot his tax bill." But if he ever moves to another state, Delgado *will* pay income tax because every penny his new team pays to "foot his tax bill" is additional income to him. The new team, however, can increase his gross salary so that after taxes, his net income would remain the same. California's tax collector would love to explain it to him.

*Bill Amsbary, Orange, Calif.*

## Diener Time

I really enjoyed your article on the Diener basketball family of Fond du Lac (*Wisconsin Pride*, Feb. 14). The Diener kids are great athletes, but knowing all of them and having taught most of them in school, I can honestly say that they are even better people. It all starts with Grandma Diener.

*Steve Zimmerman, Mount Calvary, Wis.*

Charles P. Pierce glossed over the fact that Travis and Drake Diener were both held back one year before starting high school partly in order to "physically mature." This sort of parental behavior implies that winning at athletics and getting the almighty college scholarship are more important than normal academic and social progress.

*Brian Coughlin, Oak Lawn, Ill.*

## Twofers

How utterly heartbreaking: The Sacramento Kings had to play basketball two days in a row (*Double Whammy*, Feb. 14). What would they do if they had to take a 95% to 99% pay cut and do something important and genuinely difficult like teaching children five days a week, or going into a burning building with pounds of heavy protective gear on while trying to save property and lives, then returning to the firehouse and answering another call?

*Edwin Cohen, Walnut Creek, Calif.*

My eyes hurt from reading. Maybe I should stop and take two days' rest before reading the next story.

*Eric Smith, Findlay, Ohio*

## To Contact SI

**LETTERS**

- Please e-mail us at letters@si.timeinc.com or fax us at 212-467-4049. Letters should include the writer's full name, address and home telephone number and may be edited for clarity and space.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUBSCRIPTIONS**

- For 24/7 service, please use our website, www.si.com/customerservice. You can also call 1-800-528-5000 or write to SI at P.O. Box 30602, Tampa, FL. 33630-0602.

**ADVERTISING**

- For ad rates, an editorial calendar or a media kit, e-mail us at sipubqueries@timeinc.com.

AL TIELEMANS

©2004 Energizer. Schick, Quattro and other marks are trademarks of Eveready Battery Company, Inc.

# Show your face tonight not your shadow.

*Introducing the new Schick Quattro Midnight. 4 blades. 2 conditioning strips. 1 smooth face.*

# Happy on Grumpy

*by* Steve Rushin

ANDY VAN SLYKE played centerfield next to Barry Bonds for six seasons in Pittsburgh, and in all those years, as former Pirates coach Rich Donnelly put it, "the only time Andy spoke to Barry was to say, 'I got it.' "

United by position—both were All-Star outfielders who won Gold Gloves—the two Pirates were divided by disposition. Even now, the surly Bonds and the sunny Van Slyke are like night and day. Bob Knight and Doris Day.

Bonds broods over a federal steroids investigation. Van Slyke says *his* biggest problem in 13 major league seasons was figuring out how to spend $43 a day in meal money.

Bonds says he's grown accustomed to chants of "Barry sucks!" on the road. Van Slyke never could tell the difference between home stands and road trips, except for this: "On the road," he said, "when you go downstairs for coffee in your underwear, they throw you out of the kitchen."

Barry's Grumpy. Andy's both Happy *and* Dopey. (Or so Van Slyke would have you believe.) The eldest of his four sons, A.J., is a junior at Kansas and a big league prospect. "He's the smart one," says Andy. "Intelligence skips a generation, like male-pattern baldness. A.J. will be bald and smart, like his granddad. A.J.'s son will be stupid, but he'll have a giant Afro."

Van Slyke retired 10 years ago to suburban St. Louis, where last week he watched Bonds claim in a televised press conference, "I don't know what cheating is." Then Bonds called every reporter in attendance a liar. To Van Slyke—whose 18-year-old son, Scott, will attend Ole Miss next year on a baseball scholarship—Bonds's behavior was exemplary.

"If I were a minor league director," he says, "I would show a tape of that press conference to all my players and say, 'This is how *not* to conduct yourselves.' "

Andy and his wife, Lauri, have been married for 22 years. The day after their wedding night Van Slyke played third base for the Triple A Louisville Redbirds and committed four errors in six innings. Which is how he became a centerfielder. In the years that followed the personality gap between leftfield (Bonds) and center (Van Slyke) became wider than the physical gap.

"Barry has never figured out that in life, he is ultimately in control of how people perceive him," says Van Slyke. "His problem is, maybe the way people perceive him is the way he actually is. I don't think [Giants catcher] Mike Matheny has been fooling people over the years that he's a wonderful guy. He *is* a wonderful guy. Likewise, if people don't like you, don't blame the messenger."

Van Slyke has been retired for only nine full seasons, but '95 now seems as distant as the Dead Ball era. Only six of the National League ballparks he played in are still in use, no current park has artificial turf, and Roger Maris's single-season home run record has been shattered repeatedly. "I feel like I played in a time warp," says Van Slyke, who retired at 34, an age at which many players are now—oddly—just entering their physical primes.

"I'm glad I wasn't introduced to steroids in my mid-30s because I probably would have taken them," says Van Slyke. "There was no incentive *not* to. And if I knew I could play into my late 30s and early 40s on steroids, with no cloud of shame over me, I certainly would have done it."

One summer Van Slyke stood outside a batting cage in Houston and watched Astros slugger Ken Caminiti, 25 pounds heavier than during the previous season, smoke ball after ball over the fence. Van Slyke pointed to Caminiti and twice, to a Pirates coach, pantomimed injecting a needle into his own rear end. "I had worked my ass off that off-season," says Van Slyke, "and gained seven pounds."

> Maybe Bonds's problem, says Van Slyke, is that "the way people perceive him is the way he actually is."

Still, it is without condemnation that Van Slyke names several players he is certain took steroids. "I didn't see them put needles in their asses," he says, "but Scott Peterson is going to the gas chamber on just as much evidence." He is amused by the self-righteous evasions of those embroiled in the BALCO trial. "I think of the line from *The Shawshank Redemption*," he says. " 'Everyone is innocent in here, don't you know that?' "

Every Sunday night in St. Louis, Van Slyke plays bridge with three of his teammates from the '85 National League champion St. Louis Cardinals. "We sort of create a clubhouse environment, a place where you can rip on your partner in a fun way," says Van Slyke. "My partner is Tom Lawless, and we play against two lefthanders, Rick Horton and Kenny Dayley. It's the athletes against the pitchers. The host is responsible for the chips and beer. Cigars aren't allowed, but there *is* chewing and dipping."

Van Slyke pauses, acutely aware that these are strange times even for retired ballplayers, especially as regards anything ingestible. "I want to make it clear," says Van Slyke. "In no way do I condone tobacco use for young bridge players." □

For a collection of Steve Rushin's columns, go to **SI.com/writers.**

SIMON BRUTY

Sports Illustrated

*Edited by*
MARK BECHTEL AND
STEPHEN CANNELLA

"If I could do it, somebody

# Scorec

## Cash Flow

### An explosion of NBA deadline deals—which saw dozens of players heading to new homes—had less to do with basketball than financial planning

**By Ian Thomsen**

LAST WEEK 35 players were dealt by 11 teams just before the NBA trading deadline. It was the biggest midseason flurry since 1987, and, by traditional standards, the weirdest ever. The only trade that made sense purely from a basketball standpoint was Cleveland's acquisition of Boston swingman Jiri Welsch for a future first-round draft pick, a deal that should help the Cavaliers in the playoffs while opening up minutes in the Celtics backcourt for rookies Tony Allen and Delonte West.

Every other trade would have confounded someone who only followed the action on the court. Even a nine-year-old fan would probably not be gullible enough to give away 25-year-old All-Star point guard Baron Davis in exchange for Golden State nonstars Dale Davis and Speedy Claxton, as the Hornets just did. But then not many third-graders can grasp the intricacies of the NBA marketplace, where the hottest commodity nowadays isn't size or speed. It's salary cap space.

The numbers in the players' contracts tell the story. Consider the 76ers' acquisition of Sacramento's five-time All-Star, Chris Webber, for three role players. It looked like a steal to Philly fans, who bought 6,500 tickets in the 24 hours after hearing that their beloved Allen Iverson, who has played alongside exactly one All-Star in eight years with the Sixers, had finally been paired with a peer. But given the financial realities of the NBA, the big winner might be Kings G.M. Geoff Petrie. Webber's age (32) and suspect left knee made his four-year, $80 million contract a millstone around Petrie's neck. The Kings, who made the deal on Feb. 23, realized they can't contend with him occupying so much of their budget. So Petrie gave him away to procure some depth—and, more significantly, a healthier financial future in which it will be easier for him to re-sign his 27-year-old franchise-player-in-waiting, Peja Stojakovic.

The stage has been set for this new era over the last decade, as the salaries of even mediocre performers swelled. The G.M.'s art is also shaped by league rules which state (with a few loopholes here and there) that a player can be swapped only for one or more guys making a similarly obscene amount. Thus the Bucks last week sent Keith Van Horn to Dallas for Calvin Booth and Alan Henderson. Van Horn, Milwaukee's fourth leading scorer, makes $14.5 million; the two journeymen make a combined $14.1 million.

Why would the Mavericks want Van Horn, who has been traded four times in the past three years in exchanges involving 12 players and three draft picks? He's a decent scorer who can help Dallas in the short term, and the fact that he's due $15.7 million next season in the

Get a fresh version of Scorecard every weekday at **SI.com/scorecard.**

# ard

final year of his contract makes him tradable—again. And why would the Bucks give him up for nothing? Because with Henderson's $8.3 million salary off the books next year they'll have more room to re-sign their free agent-to-be Michael Redd, who's scoring 22.4 points per game. It's the same reason the Hornets gave up Baron Davis. This summer, with Dale Davis off the books, New Orleans could be more than $10 million under the cap.

Payroll management has become so important that last summer the Lakers sent perhaps the most dominant player of his generation, Shaquille O'Neal, to the Heat for largely fiscal reasons. (The team had no desire to give him the huge extension he was seeking.) But L.A. might do the same thing with Shaq's foil, Kobe Bryant, if he doesn't bring another championship soon. Somewhere down the line of his new seven-year, $136 million deal, he might find himself packing for Memphis or Salt Lake City if the Lakers think they can find better value elsewhere.

One man who seems to be swimming against this current is Knicks president Isiah Thomas. While his rivals surrender talent to save money, Thomas takes on salary. He was vilified in the press last week for acquiring Malik Rose and Maurice Taylor, who saddled his organization with an additional $30 million in long-term salaries. But the moves actually make the Knicks marginally better in the short term and leaves Thomas a few aces up his sleeve. When the trade window reopens in the summer, he can try to deal away the final-year contracts of Penny Hardaway ($15.6 million) and Tim Thomas ($14.0 million). The following year, he can offload Taylor ($9.8 million) and Allan Houston ($20.7 million). If he can parlay those expiring contracts into a couple of all-stars, Thomas may wind up gaming the system. □

ILLUSTRATION BY JEFF WONG; SARA D. DAVIS/AP (CHANEY); GEORGE WIDMAN/AP (BRYANT)

## Over the Line

### Temple's John Chaney is basically an admirable guy. But that's no reason to pardon his aberrant behavior

**It took a** hard-core fan to raise an essential question last week about Temple coach John Chaney, whom the school suspended for the rest of the regular season after he ordered a player to brutalize an opponent. Why, asked Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell, have the chair-throwing and player-choking of a certain other Hall of Fame coach gone into the annals of demonology, while over two decades Chaney has gotten more or less a free pass despite choking one opposing coach, threatening the life of another and vowing after a loss that if he had a baseball bat, he'd use it on his players? Rendell proposed an answer to a Philadelphia radio station: Chaney "gets away with a lot of stuff because people like him. Had it been someone like Bobby Knight, who the media hates, I think they would have been calling for him to be banned forever from basketball."

Indeed, as an underdog who coaches underdogs, Chaney leads the personal life of a monk, devoting himself to young men who might otherwise be abandoned. He's funny, self-deprecating and available. After each tempestuous episode, once his eyes have retracted into his head, he's quicker than Knight to say he's sorry and accept punishment, which came belatedly last week when Temple took three days to act. On Monday, Chaney said he'll sit out the Atlantic 10 tournament, but the ban was self-imposed.

**MUGGING** A "goon" sent in by Chaney *(top)* left Bryant *(above)* with a broken arm.

The difference between Chaney and Knight was always the difference between a street fighter and a bully. His superiors have long been blinded by that image, but last week the Temple coach forever jumped character. The day before facing rival St. Joseph's, Chaney complained that the Hawks set too many illegal screens, and he vowed to send in "one of my goons." Within four minutes of entering the Owls' 63–56 loss, 6' 8", 250-pound reserve Nehemiah Ingram had spent five fouls, in the process fracturing the right arm of St. Joe's forward John Bryant. By issuing a bald threat and following through, Chaney reduced himself to a common thug. "Yeah, coach Chaney was wrong—so what?" editorialized the *Philadelphia Daily News*. Virtually every other corner of the media understands that the days of the double standard are over. Let's hope Chaney's bosses do too. —*Alexander Wolff*

# Russian Revolution

## Chelsea's new owner—and his deep pockets—have turned soccer upside down

### A FAN'S NOTES

ONE OF THE stranger sights in Britain these days is tens of thousands of West London soccer fans singing *Kalinka*. This Russian ballad, not previously heard down at the pub or at the stadium, has been adopted by Chelsea supporters in recognition of their benefactor, a Russian whose wealth has transformed a much-mocked team into the envy of Europe.

Roman Abramovich, 38, is the Siberian savior who, since buying Chelsea in 2003, has embarked on a spending spree that makes George Steinbrenner's largesse look paltry. The Yankees have a $200 million–plus payroll. That's loose change to Abramovich, who made it big in post-Soviet Russia by picking up state-owned oil companies for a song. His team's wage bill is $220 million—and that's not counting the nearly $500 million spent on player-acquisition fees in what amounts to a gamble that success can be purchased on international soccer's open transfer market, where stars are bought and sold rather than traded.

Chelsea's last top-flight title—the only one in its 100-year history—came in 1955. Yet today Chelsea stands well clear at the top of the league with 11 games left and also has a chance of winning the European Champions League. The Blues beat Liverpool to win the Carling Cup, a lesser trophy, on Sunday. Chelsea fans, like myself, are rubbing their eyes. For decades the club was a joke, no match for Manchester United and Arsenal, as cursed as the Cubs and often as inept.

**BLUES FESTIVAL** John Terry (above, right) had Abramovich (below) smiling on Sunday.

Enter Abramovich, a puppy-faced and reclusive billionaire. The price tag for Chelsea—about $250 million—was nothing for a man who uses his own 767 to flit between London and his base 12 time zones away in the frozen Russian province of Chukotka, where he's governor in his spare time. After the purchase he opened his checkbook for players and a new manager, José Mourinho, a master Portuguese tactician lured last year from European champions Porto. (Abramovich has also dabbled on the other side of the Atlantic. After purchasing Chelsea, he reportedly considered buying the Canucks and stocking them with Russian players.) Mourinho has the Blues soaring, but it will take more than the proximity of triumph to dispel a skepticism born of years in the wilderness. Blues fans know every permutation of disaster, and the team's recent FA Cup elimination suggests Abramovich's extraordinary sporting experiment doesn't guarantee success. The *Kalinkas* may fade quickly if his revolution goes into reverse. But for now we are dreaming, eyes turned to Russia with love. —*Roger Cohen*

# Go Figure

**$25,000** Reward offered by Braves pitcher Mike Hampton for information on the whereabouts of Jessica Marie Lunsford, a nine-year-old girl from his hometown of Homosassa, Fla., who was reported missing last week.

**939** Games it took Syracuse coach Jim Boeheim to get his 700th career win; only Adolph Rupp (836), Jerry Tarkanian (876), Dean Smith (904) and Phog Allen (938) reached the milestone faster.

**19** Age of Kyle Busch, who last Saturday became the youngest driver to win the pole for a Nextel Cup race, at the Auto Club 500 in Fontana, Calif.

**0** Times the Bulls allowed 100 points in 26 games from Dec. 4 to Jan. 24.

**10** Times the Bulls have allowed 100 points in the 14 games since that streak ended.

CLIVE BRUNSKILL/GETTY IMAGES (TERRY); ACTION IMAGES/WIREIMAGE.COM (ABRAMOVICH); BERENICE ABBOTT/COMMERCE GRAPHICS LTD. (JAMES JOYCE); MICHAEL ZAGARIS/MLB PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES (CANSECO); AP (ERNEST HEMINGWAY); COURTESY HARPER COLLINS (BOOK)

## The Literary Life

# Jose Canseco

ERNEST HEMINGWAY once said, "Writing, at its best, is a lonely life," and no one understands that better than Jose Canseco. Since the publication of *Juiced*, Canseco's tell-all memoir, the author has been a household name without an ally. After being ripped by players he alleged or implied used steroids—and threatened with a libel suit by former Rangers teammate Rafael Palmeiro—Canseco struck back, offering to take a polygraph . . . on pay-per-view TV. (No outlets took him up on the offer.) "That shows what his motives are," said Tony Saunders, an ex–Tampa teammate accused of taking steroids. "It's just a shame."

*Juiced* debuts at No. 1 on *The New York Times* best-seller list this Sunday, but not all of the reading public is enamored of Canseco. One day after a Tampa book signing was disrupted by a screaming man with a sign that read TRAITOR, Canseco canceled the rest of the tour when someone e-mailed him a death threat. "It's not that I believe Jose is in immediate danger," his lawyer, Robert Saunooke, said. "He's a black belt in three different kinds of karate, so he can take care of himself. We are more concerned about the people who come to the book signing." Canseco couldn't even forge a successful business relationship with a man willing to give him $40,000 for his 2000 World Series ring. After financial planner Ron Galen agreed to buy the ring on Canseco's website, Canseco last week reneged on the deal. Said Galen, "It just leaves a bad taste."

© Lorillard 2005

Lights Box: 10 mg. "tar," 0.8 mg. nicotine; Medium Box: 13 mg. "tar," 1.1 mg. nicotine; Box: 18 mg. "tar," 1.4 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method.

Newport, Newport Medium, Newport (package design), Newport Lights Menthol Box (package design), Newport Pleasure and Newport Spinnaker TM Lorillard Licensing Company LLC Reg. U.S. Pat. & Tm. Off.

# For the Record

**Won** Last Saturday by Sweden's Anja Paerson, the World Cup downhill at San Sicario, Italy—on the 2006 Olympic course. Paerson became only the second woman to win races in all four disciplines (downhill, slalom, giant slalom and Super G) in the same season. (Austria's Petra Kronberger did so in 1990–91.) A native of the same town, Tarnaby, that produced Alpine legend Ingemar Stenmark, Paerson started her career as a slalom and giant slalom specialist, winning two medals in the 2002 Olympics. She didn't compete in the two speed disciplines until last season, when she won the overall World Cup championship. After the downhill Paerson, who also won Saturday's Super G, said, "It's maybe my biggest victory."

**Completed** By the IOC evaluation commission, its four-day visit to New York. The 13-member group enjoyed jazz at Lincoln Center and dinner at Mayor Michael Bloomberg's town house with Meryl Streep and Barbara Walters. Still, New York's 2012 Olympic bid is considered a long shot. The IOC will pick the host this summer and IOC insiders privately concede that global anti-American sentiment makes the city an unlikely choice. And New York has yet to commit to building a stadium on Manhattan's West Side. "It is important to have the stadium," said Nawal El Moutawakel, the commission chairwoman. "All the cities are aware of this."

**Expecting** Forest Heiress, a 6-year-old Grade 3 stakes winner who became the first mare impregnated by 2004 Kentucky Derby and Preakness winner Smarty Jones. Smarty, who retired last summer with chronic leg injuries, had covered 28 other mares through Monday (at $100,000 each), and he's scheduled to breed a total of 110 in his first year at stud.

**Established** By former Steelers wideout Lynn Swann, a campaign committee to explore a run for governor of Pennsylvania in 2006. The committee will raise money as Swann, a Republican, decides if he wants to try to unseat Democratic incumbent Ed Rendell. Swann, 53, said he intends to have "a conversation with the people of Pennsylvania regarding a potential campaign." At least two other candidates are expected to seek the GOP nomination.

**Signed** By the Major League Baseball Players Association, the commissioner's office and the International Baseball Federation (IBAF), an agreement that Olympic drug-testing standards will govern the inaugural baseball World Cup tournament planned for March 2006. IBAF drug rules are far stricter than MLB's: International competitors are banned from taking many stimulants that aren't on baseball's forbidden list. The IBAF refused to allow major leaguers into the 16-team World Cup unless they submitted to the stricter standards.

**Died** Of heart failure at age 82, Henry Grunwald, one of the most distinguished journalists in the history of Time Inc., who as editor-in-chief from 1979 to '87 infused all of the company's titles—including SI—with his sense of fairness and energetic curiosity. Grunwald, who began his career as a copyboy at TIME after emigrating from Austria with his family, was appointed U.S. ambassador to that country in 1988. In retirement he published a memoir and, at 81, his first novel.

# A Fine Mess

## Fresno State's flashy coach turns heads, but her program is in shambles

A YEAR AFTER taking over as women's basketball coach at Fresno State in 2002, Stacy Johnson-Klein told an interviewer, "The first thing that's said when I come through the door is, 'Wow, she doesn't look like a coach.' " It's true: With her blonde hair and a wardrobe heavy on high heels and plunging necklines, Johnson-Klein will never be mistaken for Gene Keady.

When—or if—she'll cut a striking figure on the sideline again is another matter. On Feb. 9 Fresno State placed her on administrative leave, citing an investigation into violations of university policies and NCAA infractions. Last week the *Fresno Bee* reported that last fall Johnson-Klein took several prescription Vicodin pills from sophomore guard Chantella Perera, who said she felt pressure to give the meds to the coach.

**SUSPENDED** Accused of pressuring a player for prescription painkillers, Johnson-Klein may lose her job.

A lawyer for Johnson-Klein, who was also accused of making racist remarks to a player, acknowledged that the coach took one pill and told SI on Monday that he was not optimistic she'd get her job back. If she doesn't return, Johnson-Klein's top four assistants might not quit, as they vowed to do last week. Said interim coach Adrian Wiggins to the *Bee*, "I could not convince myself that I would allow my child to play under these circumstances."

AGENCE ZOOM/GETTY IMAGES (PAERSON); TED THAI/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES (GRUNWALD); DARRELL WONG/THE FRESNO BEE (JOHNSON-KLEIN)

# The Show

By Bill Scheft

GOOD TO BE HERE. Are you like me? Ever since the Barry Bonds press conference last week, you can't get the theme for *Sanford and Son* out of your head?

**Temple coach John Chaney suspended for rest of season** It's all part of the NCAA's "Icon Busting Saturday."

During a loss to St. Joseph's the Temple coach put in a benchwarmer to purposely commit hard fouls. Chaney is still embarrassed. Of course he is. I'm sure he's thinking, Why didn't I send a goon to break John Calipari's arm in 1994?

**Scientists discover previously undetectable steroid** It's called DMT. Apparently its molecular structure is very similar to DMV, except the lines are much shorter.

Sprinter Kelli White claimed she was told by BALCO chief Victor Conte to make up the story that she took steroids for narcolepsy despite not having the disease. I think that was the story, but I nodded off halfway through.

Conte was one of the first bass players for Tower of Power. Of course, back then, the band was 30 pounds lighter and known as Tower of Singles Hitters.

**Jose Canseco offers to take a lie detector test on Pay-Per-View** I don't know about you, but I'm not plunking down any money unless there's a guarantee I'll hear the word *gonad*.

Canseco was planning to auction his 2000 world championship ring from the Yankees for $40,000. And for an extra $10,000 he was willing to throw in the matching electronic ankle bracelet.

Canseco canceled his book tour after an alleged death threat. Police have narrowed the suspects to 5% to 7% of the players' union.

MLB ratified a five-year contract with the umpires' union, which included a 5% raise. Meanwhile, Questec got seven years and a 10% bump.

**New moon over Oakland?** The impending acquisition of Randy Moss raises a serious question for Raider Nation: Can you fit one of those giant Afro wigs under a Darth Vader helmet?

Last week the NFL Network broadcast 14 hours live from the scouting combine. Don't get excited. It worked out to three hours inside the Hoosierdome, the other 11 watching Maurice Clarett cram for the Wonderlic test.

The Cowboys signed Drew Bledsoe. The deal won't be official until he passes a physical—and Bill Parcells hands Drew Henson a fielder's mitt.

**Deals galore at NBA trade deadline** Or, as I like to call it, the Malik Rose Parade.

The Celtics reacquired former captain Antoine Walker for Gary Payton, Michael Stewart, Tom Gugliotta and three Danny Ainge apologies to be named later.

Alonzo Mourning passed his physical with the Heat. Pretty impressive. He did 20 reps with Stan Van Gundy hanging on to his leg.

The p.r. people at Goodyear want the Pistons' Richard Hamilton to continue to arrange his braids to resemble the tread pattern of its Assurance TripleTred tire. This is nothing new. Didn't Oliver Miller used to make promotional appearances as the Michelin Man?

**Gary Bettman claims he was "set up" by NHL players' union** I think I speak for all hockey fans when I say, "Do what you will to us, but for the love of God, don't take advantage of Gary Bettman!"

**IOC evaluation committee takes 11-hour tour of New York City** And that was just the cab ride from Kennedy airport to the hotel.

***USA Today* publishes list of "10 Worst Jobs in Sports."** Little bit of a shocker at No. 5: Men's room attendant on the Madden Cruiser.

My time is up. You've been great. Enjoy the Wonders.

---

Bill Scheft bid $150 on eBay to rename the ice at the FleetCenter after Ted Williams.

# Q+A

## Cal Ripken Jr.

This month the 44-year-old Ironman begins hosting a baseball show with his brother Billy on XM Satellite Radio

**SI:** What can listeners expect from Cal Ripken Jr., talk-show host?

**Ripken:** I'll talk about baseball and expand on my opinions and philosophy of youth baseball. Billy is very witty and quick, and you never know what he might say. I'll be more buttoned-up, but maybe Billy will be the Howard Stern of the show.

**SI:** Will your streak of 2,632 consecutive games ever be broken?

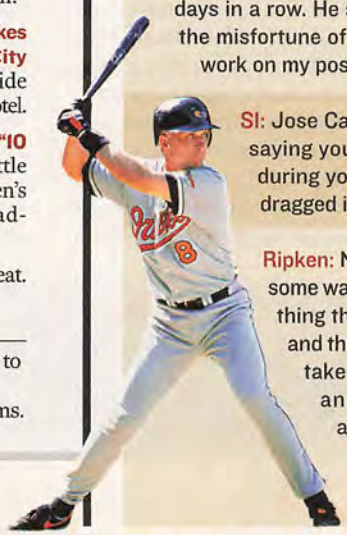
**Ripken:** I feel if I could do it, somebody else could do it. I wasn't Superman. You have to have a little luck, and you have to be durable.

**SI:** You have the ball from the final out of the 1983 World Series. If Doug Mientkiewicz called and offered his Red Sox ball straight up for yours, would you do it?

**Ripken:** No. Those things have personal meaning. I don't know whether it was right of me to grab the ball. I caught the last out and [the fans] tried to take it out of my glove when they ran on the field in Philadelphia. But I held on to it really tight, and I ended up with it. Therefore it's mine.

**SI:** You have a basketball court at your house. Who's the most interesting competition you're facing these days?

**Ripken:** Gheorghe Muresan. He's come up a couple Sundays in a row. He still can shoot really well. I've had the misfortune of trying to guard him. I tend not to work on my post game if we end up matching up.



**SI:** Jose Canseco called you out in his book, saying you received preferential treatment during your career. Are you angry at being dragged into his story?

**Ripken:** No. Maybe he's mad at baseball in some way, and I became a symbol of something that was happening that was good, and therefore he lashed out at me. I don't take it personally. I played my career and lived my life in a certain way and that speaks for itself.

*—Richard Deitsch*

ILLUSTRATION BY DREW FRIEDMAN; LARRY GOREN/WIREIMAGE.COM (RIPKEN); ALLEN KEE/WIREIMAGE.COM (RIPKEN BATTING)

# The Beat

By Lisa Altobelli

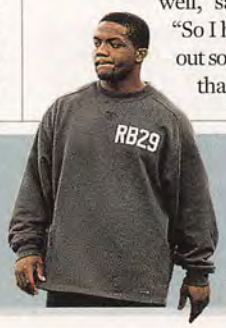
HOW COOL has **LeBron James** made the Cleveland Cavaliers? Cool enough that **Usher** *(below)* wants to be a part of the team. Michigan businessman **Dan Gilbert** last month agreed to purchase the Cavs from **Gordon Gund** for $375 million, and Usher, a five-time Grammy winner, will have a minority stake. He's not the first hip-hop artist to take on the role of part owner of an NBA team. **Nelly** is part of the Bobcats' ownership group, and one of the owners of the Nets is **Jay-Z**, who has enlisted a rival—Knicks guard **Jamal Crawford**—to appear in television ads promoting The S. Carter Academy (Jay-Z's real name is **Shawn Carter**) for kids who want to pursue a career in music, art or sports.

■ **Roger Federer** and **Andre Agassi** took tennis to new heights last week, hitting balls 700 feet above the ground on a helipad at the Burij Al Arab hotel in Dubai *(page 4)*, where the stars were playing in the Dubai Duty Free Men's Open. "I had no issues with the height as long as I didn't have to bungee jump off the side," said Agassi.

■ It might cost him his beloved cowboy hat, but Red Sox first baseman **Kevin Millar** has nonetheless seems amenable to being made over this month on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. "I won't cut my hair, but they can do my face, nails, toes, whatever," Millar, 33, told the *Boston Herald*. "They said they've got some surprises planned, whatever that means, but it will be funny." Instead of renovating Millar's home—which is currently a spring training hotel room—the Fab Five would rebuild a Little League field in Port Charlotte, Fla., that was damaged by the hurricanes last year.

■ It's official: "**DerekJeter**" is a dirty word in Boston. At least that's what FleetCenter president **Richard Krezwick** said last week when New York City lawyer and Yankees fan **Kerry Konrad** bid $2,325 and won an eBay auction for the naming rights to the arena and tried calling it the Derek Jeter Center. (Bank of America acquired FleetBoston last year and the facility's name is obsolete, so daily naming rights are being auctioned off for charity, with the new name plastered on signs throughout the facility and website.) Konrad's idea, however, was rejected. "All names have to be rated G," said Krezwick. "We determined that the Derek Jeter Center is an obscene and vulgar use of the English language in Boston." Konrad then had a friend donate an extra $6,275 to rename the building the Jimmy Fund Center, after a Boston cancer charity. The total of the bids, $8,600, amounts to 100 bucks for each of the 86 years the Red Sox went before winning the 2004 World Series.

■ **Mo Vaughn** doesn't play for the Mets anymore, but he is still trying to do his part for New York. Vaughn recently procured a $28.6 million housing development loan to buy two low-income apartments in the Bronx, which he will spend $5 million to renovate—and he won't raise the rent. "I came to New York to play ball, and that didn't work out so well," said Vaughn. "So I had to figure out something else that might."



**PICTURE THIS** What was Poland's Dariusz Michalczewski thinking as fellow light heavyweight Fabrice Tiozzo rearranged his face? *Ouch!* and *I came out of retirement for this?* are good bets. Michalczewski, 36, a former WBO champ, returned to the ring last Saturday after a 16-month hiatus to take Tiozzo's WBA belt. Tiozzo won by TKO in the sixth round, forcing Michalczewski to face the fact that his career has gone as flat as his nose.

## THIS WEEK'S SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

A Norwegian soccer player delayed his retirement when his team offered to buy him all the pizza he could eat for another season.

## They Said It

**MAURICE CLARETT** Former Ohio State running back, on his new attitude heading into the NFL draft combine *(page 42)*: "It's a humbling thing being humble."

CHRISTIAN CHARISIUS/REUTERS (PICTURE THIS); TODD ROSENBERG (CLARETT); MARK MAINZ/GETTY IMAGES (USHER);

# The best place under the sun is also the best place under the moon.

Wendy's® makes everything at night the same way they make it during the day: fresh. So you can eat great, even late!®

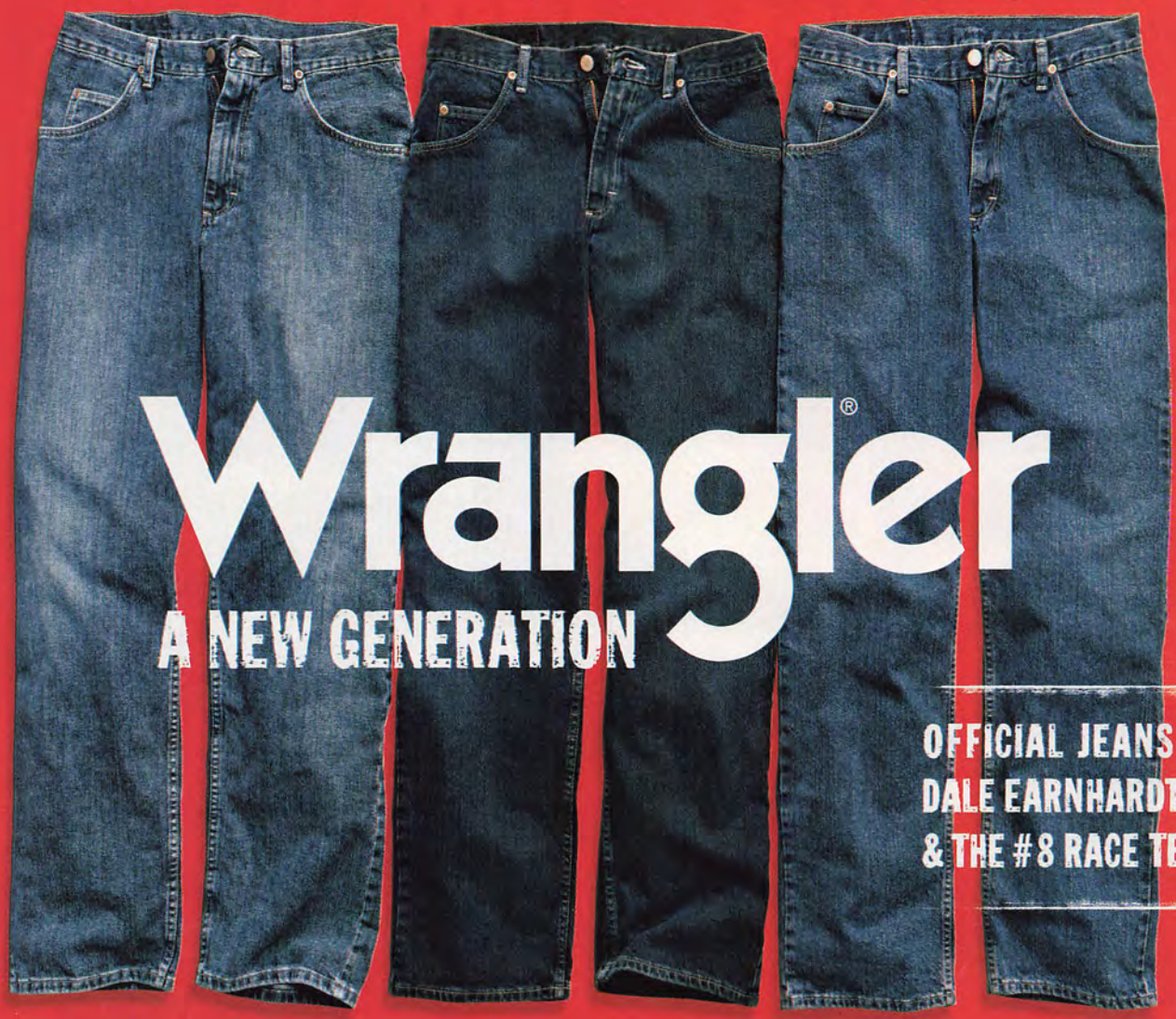
Wendy's
OLD FASHIONED HAMBURGERS

Pick Up Window
Open 'til midnight or later

At participating locations.

© 2004 Oldemark LLC.

# Wrangler®
## JEANS Co
ESTABLISHED 1947



# Wrangler®
## A NEW GENERATION

**OFFICIAL JEANS OF DALE EARNHARDT JR. & THE #8 RACE TEAM**

**NEW FITS · NEW FABRICS · NEW STYLES**

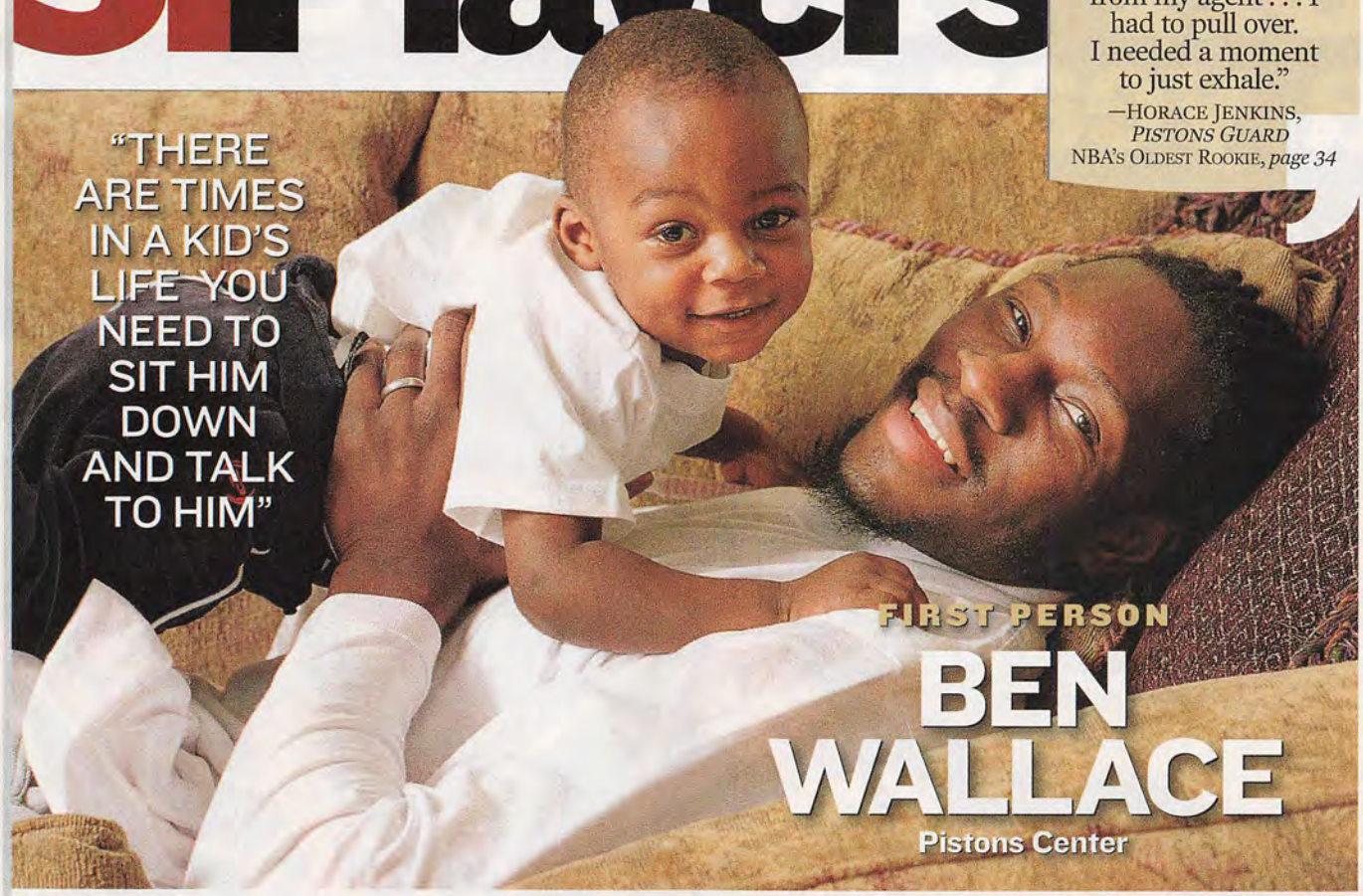
CALL 1-888-784-8571 FOR A STORE NEAR YOU OR VISIT WWW.WRANGLER.COM

We Fit Your Life © 2005 VF Jeanswear, Inc.
The Dale Earnhardt, Inc. (DEI) and #8 Car Shield Designs are trademarks, copyrights and/or intellectual property of DEI and are used by Wrangler under authority of DEI.

*Edited by*
KOSTYA KENNEDY
AND B.J. SCHECTER

# SI Players

"When I got the call from my agent . . . I had to pull over. I needed a moment to just exhale."
—HORACE JENKINS, *PISTONS GUARD*
NBA'S OLDEST ROOKIE, *page 34*




FIRST PERSON

## BEN WALLACE

Pistons Center

**ON PRO WRESTLING** I've been a fan a long time. "Hacksaw" Jim Duggan, Andre the Giant, King Kong Bundy. I go back. I've got an exact replica of the WWE championship belt, because every heavyweight needs his own belt.

**ON GROWING UP IN WHITE HALL, ALA., IN A HOUSE WITH 10 SIBLINGS** You always had someone to play with and never had trouble getting a game of four on four. My family looked out for each other and made sure everyone did what he was supposed to do. It was like having three other moms and seven other fathers.

**ON HIS WIFE, CHANDA, AND SONS BEN JR., 8, AND BRYCE, 22 MONTHS** *(above)* I always want to be there for my kids. It's hard for a woman to teach a man how to be a man. There are certain times in a kid's life you need to sit him down and talk to him. It's important to let him know that just because he's starting to grow hair under his nose, that doesn't make him a man.

**ON HIS HAIR** When I was with Washington, in 1997–98, me, Darvin Ham and Chris Webber had a bet on who would be the first to cut his hair. The little bush got bigger. Finally Darvin cut his, then Chris cut his. I was braiding it up, but the braids started looking bad so I let the 'fro loose. Now the way I wear it depends on how my wife feels, if she wants to braid it up that day. If she doesn't want to get involved with it, I'll wear the 'fro.

**ON CUTTING FRIENDS' HAIR AS A TEENAGER** I was the best, a self-taught master. I could cut anything. I made some mistakes, but I made most of them on myself and my nephews.

**ON HIS NICKNAME** Body? When I got to Detroit [in a 2000 trade], I was in the weight room and guys started calling me Big Body. It got shortened, and it stuck. I lift a lot in the off-season. Hit the weights for a couple of hours, play some pickup, go home to the weight room in my garage and lift some more.

**ON MAJORING IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE AT VIRGINIA UNION IN THE MID-'90S** I don't think I want to do law enforcement, but law school definitely. Being a lawyer is one way that I can give back. I'd have to be a defense lawyer, though. I'm a pretty good defender.

**ON PLAYING DEFENSE** There are so many great offensive players. On any night a guy can step out and drop 30. You have to accept that you are not going to shut a guy down, but if you play him tough and make him work, he'll have a tough night. It's more mental than physical. If you go out and don't believe you have what it takes to slow a guy down, you're probably right. But if you believe in yourself and force your man to do something he doesn't want to do, you have a chance to keep him under control. *—As told to Chris Mannix*

**THE 6′ 9″, 240-POUND WALLACE, 30, IS SECOND IN THE NBA IN REBOUNDS PER GAME (11.9) AND FIFTH IN BLOCKS (2.52)**

TOM PIDGEON/GETTY IMAGES (WALLACE HEAD); JEFFREY SAUGER (JENKINS)

PHOTOGRAPH BY CLAY PATRICK MCBRIDE

# Dave got off the couch a year ago.

## He hasn't been back on it since.

Want to enjoy life more? Stay healthy? Get in shape? It starts in parks. Public parks and recreation facilities are where to go to get fit, reduce chronic disease and have fun. Close to home or far away, America's public parks are where people get healthy.

So be active, volunteer, and support funding for parks and recreation. Make an investment that improves your health and your happiness — for a lifetime. It starts in parks!

**Go to www.nrpa.org now to find out how you can make a difference!**

It Starts in Parks

**National Recreation and Park Association**

*Healthy Lifestyles, Livable Communities*

# WHO'S Hot

## Tony Richardson

One day after playing for victorious AFC in NFL Pro Bowl, Chiefs fullback went on weeklong relief mission to Sri Lanka, where he hauled rice bags and weighed sugar rations for tsunami victims. He ran into other NFLers (such as Giants receiver Amani Toomer), snapped photos and recorded it all in a journal on kcchiefs.com.

## Fenway Faithful

Red Sox are scheduled to visit the White House this week, ace Curt Schilling's ankle is on the mend (two bullpen sessions, good progress), and fans just learned that they will see their boys receive their championship rings on Opening Day—right in front of those &*%$# Yankees.

## Dawn Staley

Same week the WNBA point guard re-signed with the Sting, the Temple coach guided her No. 16 women's hoops team to its 21st straight win, closing an unbeaten Atlantic 10 season. Even before last week's men's hoops debacle *(page 19)* a *Philadelphia Daily News* headline read STALEY, NOT CHANEY, NOW HAS THE BEST SHOW IN PHILADELPHIA.

## David Beckham

Life is sweet! A few days after soccer's megaceleb became a new dad (he and wife Posh had their third son, Cruz), he was out with Beyoncé on one arm, J. Lo on the other, promoting the Pepsi ad the three will appear in this month.

## Pennsylvania

College hoops team dominated Ivy League and was first men's squad to clinch spot in NCAAs. NBA's Sixers got five-time All-Star Chris Webber for a playoff run, moving Allen Iverson to say he was—brace yourself—eager to *practice*. And Pittsburgh's NFL kingpin, RB Jerome Bettis, silenced retirement talk by signing a one-year deal to stay in the Steel City.

# WHO'S Not

## Bode Miller

Lost weekend for hell-bent New Hampshire schusser: He slid off course in last Saturday's giant slalom, he crashed into a gate in Sunday's slalom, and what was once a 191-point lead in the World Cup standings has slipped to 31, threatening Miller's chances to become first U.S. man to win circuit in 22 years.

## Patriots Faithful

Fan favorite Ty Law is out (released), and gouging is in. Ticket prices were hiked 20%, and while Pats announced they'll relax no-transfer policy on season tickets—team got bad press last year after a ticket holder died and Pats demanded the tickets back from his cancer-stricken son—it comes at a price. Transferring to family member costs $2,500–$5,000 a seat.

## Deion Sanders

Forget prime time. Heck, forget prime beef. The man who has played in a World Series and Super Bowl, who was a CBS analyst and last year made a comeback as a Ravens CB, is doing infomercials for Deion Sanders' Hot Dog Express, which lets you cook 12 frankfurters on metal rollers.

## David Beckham

Work is rough! A few days after being sent home from practice with flu symptoms, Real Madrid star arrived at a Coruna, Spain, hotel before last Saturday's game against rival Deportivo and had an egg thrown at him by a fan. (It missed.) Then, in a steady rain, he and mates suffered a 2–0 loss.

## Kyle Shanahan

The 25-year-old son of Broncos leading man, Mike, is the Bucs' "offensive quality control coach." How's this for offensive quality? At the combine in Indy, Kyle got arrested for public intoxication after an officer found him being "belligerent and causing a scene" outside the Have a Nice Day Café.

# SI PLAYERS POLL

Based on a survey of 227 NBA players

STOP

For complete results and breakdown of the poll go to SI.com/scorecard.

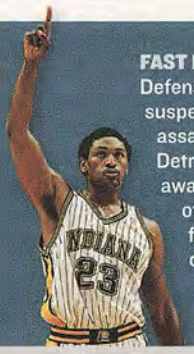
**Who is the best defensive player in the NBA?**

**Ron Artest** ..... **34%**
***Pacers forward***

Ben Wallace ..... 18%
*Pistons center*

Bruce Bowen ..... 15%
*Spurs forward*

Kevin Garnett ..... 8%
*Timberwolves forward*



**FAST FACTS:** Artest, last year's NBA Defensive Player of the Year, was suspended for the season after assaulting fans in the stands in Detroit on Nov. 19. Wallace won the award in 2002 and 2003. . . . 41% of shooting guards and small forwards picked Artest; 26% of centers chose Wallace. . . . Jazz forward Andrei Kirilenko was fifth (7%).

KIRBY LEE/WIREIMAGE.COM (RICHARDSON ACTION); COURTESY OF THE KANSAS CITY CHIEFS (RICHARDSON SRI LANKA); ALESSANDRO TROVATI/AP (MILLER); COURTESY OF DEION SANDERS AND THE HOT DOG EXPRESS (SANDERS); LAVANDEIRA JR./EPA (BECKHAM); STEVE C. MITCHELL/EPA (ARTEST); ANDREA COMAS/REUTERS (BECKHAM, LOPEZ, KNOWLES); GARRETT W. ELLWOOD/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (STALEY)

**CHANGING LANES** Swimming in short, fast bursts helps Castroneves get ready for his hours behind the wheel.

• MY BODY

# Eyes On the Prize

## How leading Indy Car driver Helio Castroneves keeps fit and focused

*By Andrew Lawrence*

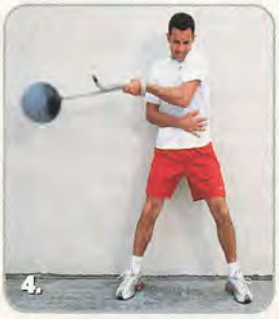
**DO YOU** really need to be in great shape to *drive a car*? Two-time Indianapolis 500 winner Helio Castroneves, whose career—and life—depends upon his ability to round a turn at 180 mph in heavy traffic with two cars closing on his spoiler, needs to have his reflexes razor sharp. "There are so many variables in a race," says Castroneves, nicknamed Spider-Man for his practice of scaling the chain-link catch fence to celebrate wins. "So many things happen so quickly, your concentration needs to be up." And the mind-body connection must be instantaneous.

That's especially true now that the IndyCar Series, which opens at the Homestead-Miami Speedway this Sunday, will include road courses for the first time. (The first of three road races—with sharp right turns and far more braking and changes in acceleration than you find on ovals—will be on April 3 in St. Petersburg.) The 29-year-old Castroneves doesn't work out with weights at the fitness center he goes to in Miami because bulking up could cramp his style behind the wheel, but his personal trainer of three years, Carlos Bailly, has devised a six-times-a-week regimen that tunes Castroneves's 5' 8", 147-pound frame while preparing him to react quickly and correctly under intense pressure. "A slight hesitation, a little delay because the muscle didn't respond to the mind, and that's it. The race is over," says Castroneves, who may shift gears as many as 40 times a lap. "In a long race, if I'm worried about fatigue, my concentration is the first thing to go."

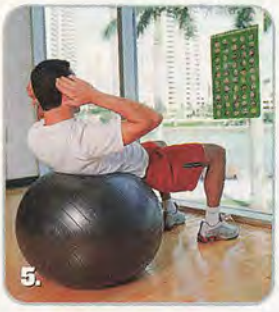
**1. RUNNING MAN** *Hit the beach. Six miles on the boardwalk (Castroneves maintains about a 6:45-minute-per-mile pace) or three miles on sand (8:30 pace).* Often fatigued by a schedule that takes him to 17 cities in 33 weeks during the season, Castroneves relies on his morning run with the 36-year-old Bailly to reboot for the high-intensity drills that follow. "You can't beat a run on the beach at sunrise," says Castroneves, who often races Bailly. "Sometimes I'm inspired, and I want to kick his butt."

**2. WATER BOY** *(opposite page) Swim sprints—all freestyle. After a leisurely 500-meter warmup, 20 sprints of 25 meters (he does each sprint in about 20 seconds) with 30 seconds' rest between each.* A driver's heart rate can reach 200 beats per minute during a road-course race, 4½ times faster than his normal rate. Training in brief, quick bursts helps Castroneves's heart find that high gear and transition back down smoothly. "I used to hate swimming," says Castroneves, recalling his youth in São Paulo. "When my mom dropped me off at the pool, I'd sneak out the back. Obviously I'm not Michael Phelps now, but I've come to realize that swimming is the best exercise because it is low impact and uses the whole body."

**3. GLOVE GUY** *Spar five two- to three-minute rounds, separated by a minute's rest.* Bailly assigns a number to each of the six major punches—"one" might be a left jab, "four" a right hook, and so on. Bailly calls out numbers at random in pairs or threes, jumbling the order to produce different punch combinations. (Castroneves is always the puncher.) The idea is to train Castroneves to quickly process and react to oral information (as he must when getting mid-race instructions over his radio). This also builds hand speed for quick shifts and turns. "The way you use your arms and shoulders in boxing is very similar to how we use them [in racing]," Castroneves says. "The way boxers are ready to attack is the same way we must be ready to attack the steering wheel."




**4. SWINGER** In the tornado exercise an eight-pound medicine ball is attached to four feet of rope. Standing against a wall, Castroneves wraps the rope around one hand at the wrist, leaving about 1½ feet of rope between the ball and the top of the fist. With his stomach taut and legs shoulder-width apart, he whips the ball from side to side against the wall for 18 to 20 seconds. "When [Bailly] first showed this to me, I had no idea what he was talking about. But it gives you great ab support. You have to make sure you swing the ball fast." This exercise also strengthens the arms and shoulders.




**5. SENSES AND SENSIBILITY** Lying on a Swiss ball, Castroneves faces a chart *(inset)* showing five columns of 10 balls (basketballs, footballs, baseballs, tennis balls), each with a number from 1 to 50. Bailly picks a starting point, then Castroneves calls out the rest of the column by number and ball type while doing sit-ups ("25 golf ball, 37 football"). Bailly tries to distract Castroneves during the drill, blaring music, yelling, bouncing a ball and sometimes having a third person yell as well. Bailly often adds another chart with numbers and balls in a different order and directs Castroneves from chart to chart until both are covered completely. The exercise takes about five minutes per chart. "If you miss a number, you're going to keep doing sit-ups," says Castroneves. "This is a good way to improve your concentration."

## A DRIVER'S FUEL

**CASTRONEVES HAS** concocted a homemade brew that has become an indispensable part of his prerace routine. He calls it the Tiger and downs one a couple of hours before the green flag drops. He says it fills his tank without weighing him down. "When I have steak or pasta, it gives my stomach a weird sensation—and I feel like I want to take a nap," he says. "I can't go without eating. I have to make sure I have something before I go out and race."

**The Tiger:** *one cup milk; one banana; one cup Frosted Flakes; one cup ice (optional)*
*Combine milk, cereal, ice and banana in blender and combine for about 30 seconds or until desired smoothness. For a thicker mix, add more banana.*
Says Castroneves: "The banana is good for retaining water, and the sugar brings me up. It's going to look like oatmeal when it's done, but it tastes much better."

# The Questions *with* Brian Roberts

*Orioles Second Baseman*

**What was your welcome-to-the-big-leagues moment?** I was called up in midseason, and I went straight from the airport to the locker room. Our manager [Mike Hargrove] said, "You're playing shortstop and hitting second. Don't get nervous." That was impossible. There were 45,000 people there, and Cal Ripken was playing third. I almost [peed on] myself.

**What's one thing fans don't realize about playing in the majors?** The number of games. From February to October we have about 15 days off.

**If I were commissioner for a day, I would . . .** go back to a balanced schedule. It's not fun to face the Red Sox and the Yankees 18 times a year. We're not exactly on a level playing field. They can go over the salary cap and pay the tax. We should play more teams outside our division. It would mean more travel, but it would be worth it for a better chance at the playoffs.

**If I weren't playing baseball, I would . . .** be a radio or sports broadcaster. In college at South Carolina, I did some stuff with the radio station and really liked it.

## Last Week

Roberts, 27, came to camp as the clear-cut starter for the first time. After seeing Sammy Sosa club homer after homer in batting practice, Roberts said, "It was fun to watch."

## This Week

The O's open their spring schedule with Thursday and Friday games against Florida.

ROBERT LABERGE/GETTY IMAGES (RACE CAR); MICHAEL CONROY/AP (CASTRONEVES INSET); WILLIAM DEERING/CORBIS (MILK); COURTESY OF KELLOGG'S COMPANY (FROSTED FLAKES); STEVE MOORE (ROBERTS ACTION); MARK GOLDMAN/ICON SMI (ROBERTS HEADSHOT)

● NBA'S OLDEST ROOKIE

# The Guy Who Never Gave Up

*At age 30, 6' 1" Pistons point guard Horace Jenkins is the oldest rookie in the NBA and one of the oldest in league history. Jenkins was 11 when he told his mom he would play in the NBA, but he took a circuitous route to the top.*

**1974** On Oct. 14 Jenkins is born—to be a football star, he thinks, until, as an eighth-grader in Elizabeth, N.J., he realizes he doesn't like practicing outdoors in cold weather, so he focuses on hoops. He plays point guard, not because he idolizes Magic Johnson (though he does) but because "I was always the smallest one."

**1993** Graduates from Elizabeth High after being mostly a backup for three years, then sitting out his senior season due to academic ineligibility. He enrolls in New Jersey's Union County College, where he averages 18.4 points per game as a freshman.

**1994** Drops out of college to care for infant son Hakim. "It was one of the better decisions I've made," says Jenkins. He works as an electrician for two years, then takes an $11-an-hour job with a Scandinavian postal company in the U.S. "It was tough to walk away from a dream," says Jenkins, "but it was my responsibility and I was willing to shoulder it."

**1998** (Summer) Playing pro-am ball in Newark, he is noticed by William Paterson coach Jose Rebimbas. "The first possession he came down an outdoor court and hit an NBA three at 100 miles per hour. I thought, Who's that kid?" said Rebimbas. "Afterward I handed him my business card and said, 'It takes me 45 minutes to get home. If you're serious about going back to school, I'll expect to hear from you in 45 minutes.' As I walked up the stairs to my house I heard my wife say, 'O.K., I'll give him the message.' "

**1998** (Fall) Enrolls as a sophomore communications major. He will lead the Division III Pioneers to two Final Fours, earn three national player of the year awards and set school records for points (1,940) and single-season scoring average (27.1 ppg).

**2001** Not drafted after being projected to go in the first round. "That was probably one of the toughest things," said Jenkins, who attended two predraft camps. "I did everything I was supposed to do. I just took it as a test from God." Moves to Italy to play for Aironi Novara, then for Virtus Roma.

**2003** Moves to Greece and averages 20 points for AEK Athens. Is spotted by Pistons president Joe Dumars, watching tapes to keep tabs on draft pick Andreas Glyniadakis. "I kept seeing this other guy . . . really fast, pushing the ball up, scoring," Dumars told the *Detroit Free Press*. "Soon my staff and I were saying . . . 'Are you thinking what I'm thinking?' "

**2004** (Summer) Gets invited by the Pistons to play in a summer league. "He knew that because of his age, this would be the last opportunity," said Rebimbas. Jenkins averaged 8.2 points and 2.8 assists. He lands a guaranteed one-year contract for about $385,000 with Detroit. "When I got the call from my agent, I was driving and I had to pull over," said Jenkins, who's married and has two daughters, Hanasia and Hamyah, in addition to Hakim. "I needed a moment to just exhale, to let out a sigh of relief."

**2004** (Fall) Marvels at the five-star hotels and NBA "royalty treatment." Assigned to play the point behind Chauncey Billups and Lindsey Hunter and averages 3.7 points in 7.8 minutes a game. "He's gotten a lot better," Billups told New Jersey's *Herald News*. "[He has] not gotten too excited and not let this whole thing break him down."

**2004** (December) Gets put on injured reserve for "back spasms." Rumors of being traded to Bulls.

**2005** Is back on the active roster by February. "This is a big opportunity," says Jenkins, who had eight points in a win over L.A. last month. "I've got to try to go out there and do more, and I have no problem with that. I'm a person who refuses to fail."

*—Amanda Cherrin*

## VIDEO MATCHUP Duke alum Bobby Hurley VS. North Carolina's Kenny Smith

*With an eye toward* **Sunday's Duke-Carolina showdown in Chapel Hill,** *the former Blue Devils and Tar Heels point guards played for their alma maters in* EA Sports NCAA March Madness 2005 *on Xbox Live.*

**WEARING A** black Duke T-shirt and seated on a couch beneath posters of Hilary Duff and Lindsay Lohan in his kids' playroom in his Colts Neck, N.J., home, the still-gritty Hurley *(left)* was confident despite battling the flu. "It never took a whole lot to get up for Carolina," said Hurley, who owns and breeds thoroughbred horses. Meanwhile, Smith, taking time out from his gig as a Turner Sports broadcaster, arrived at the Atlanta Ritz-Carlton for the 9:30 a.m. tip-off just three hours after getting off a red-eye from L.A.

Smith, who set a then school record of 768 assists as a Tar Heel from 1983 through '87, got Carolina rolling with guard Raymond Felton racing downcourt and blowing by defenders for dunk after dunk. "Looks like I'm at the Kentucky Derby!" Smith shouted through the speaker to Hurley, whose horse, Songandaprayer, ran in the Derby in 2001. But Hurley, the NCAA's alltime assist leader with 1,076, kept it close thanks to the long-range shooting of J.J. Redick, who had 14 points (four three-pointers) at the half as Duke trailed 22–20.

With the score tied at 28, the home Tar Heels went on a 23–8 run that featured Felton's fadeaway three-pointer. "This dude is killing me," Hurley said. With a minute left, Smith took a page from Dean Smith's playbook by going to the Four Corner offense, to Hurley's dismay. "Sorry about this, Bobby," said Smith. But not that sorry. As UNC ran out the clock, Smith yelled, "Tar Heels are dancing on Franklin Street! And that is how it's going to be on [Sunday]!" **NORTH CAROLINA 57, DUKE 43** *—Ben Reiter*

STEVEN FREEMAN (THE GAME OF LIFE); JEFFREY SAUGER (JENKINS); NANCY BROWN/CORBIS (BABY); MEDIOIMAGES/GETTY IMAGES ($100 BILL); CORBIS (TV); JOHN BIEVER (HURLEY); JOHN D. HANLON (SMITH)

TM

# Nicorette® fresh mint™ is the best tasting nicotine gum.

***(Which is convenient, since now that you've quit, you can actually taste things again.)***

Your sense of taste returns when you quit smoking. That means you can taste all sorts of things, including the nicotine gum you're using to help you quit. Which is why you should quit with Nicorette fresh mint. It's the best tasting nicotine gum. In fact, four out of five consumers prefer it to generic nicotine gum.

***Start chewing. Start quitting.***

Nicorette® fresh mint™

Use as directed. Start with 1 piece every 1 to 2 hours, and follow dosing schedule. Do not exceed 24 pieces a day. Support program improves chances of success. Individual results may vary. For more information, please visit www.nicorette.com. © 2005 GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare, L.P.

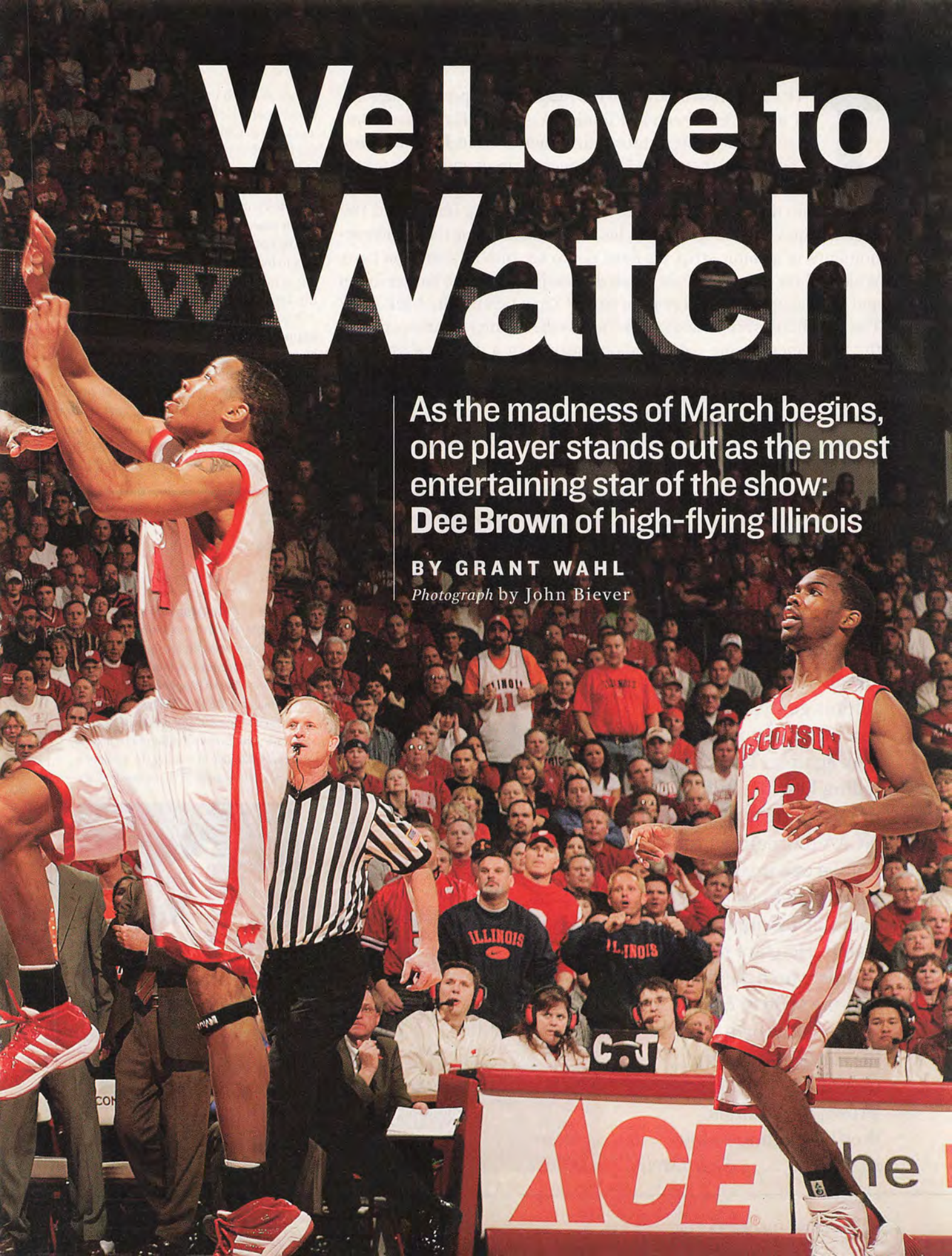
**MR. EXCITEMENT** All eyes know where to look when the dynamic Brown has the ball in his talented hands.

# We Love to Watch

As the madness of March begins, one player stands out as the most entertaining star of the show: **Dee Brown** of high-flying Illinois

BY GRANT WAHL

*Photograph* by John Biever



THERE WAS a time when the most stirring performance any of us had ever seen at Illinois's Assembly Hall was Arthur Agee's tearjerking state-tournament run in *Hoop Dreams*. These days, though, as Illinois inches closer and closer to perfection, another Chicago-bred greyhound is leading us on a high-wire journey into the basketball canon. Whenever Fighting Illini guard Dee Brown surges into the open court, his headbanded braids trailing like action lines in a comic strip, it's hard not to see him as a cartoon hero. What will the One-Man Fast Break do next? Knife to the basket for an and-one layup? Stop and pop for three? Zip a behind-the-back pass? The possibilities are boundless. So, too, is the country's anticipation as the most memorable college hoops season in a decade shifts into endgame and the sports world begins focusing in earnest on the annual Kabuki dance of conference tournaments and bracket projections. ¶ What can Brown do for you? What can't he do? While he may not be his top-ranked team's best NBA prospect (that would be Deron Williams) or its leading scorer (take a bow, Luther Head), no player in the nation brings as much feral intensity to the hardwood stage. No player burns our mental hard drives with more astounding moves, the kind that make you pick up your cellphone and call a friend: *"Did you see what Dee Brown just did?"* The circuits were presumably jammed on Feb. 8 after the 6-foot junior erased a second-half deficit at Michigan by turning three straight steals into baskets to bury the Wolverines and begin making a now-solid case for himself as the Big Ten's most valuable player.

It was the most remarkable minutelong sequence of the college season, and when he was done, Brown assumed his trademark pose, looping his thumbs inside his jersey and showing off the ILLINOIS on his chest to the masses. Amazing, isn't it, how a charismatic figure can make even nonhunters think it's cool to wear orange? Then again, former Illinois coach Bill Self had a

# Dee-Lightful Matchups

With his lightning-quick hands, killer first step and sweet shooting stroke, Illinois guard Dee Brown can be a nightmare to play against. There's no telling how the luck of the draw will treat the Illini at NCAA tournament time, but we can imagine some matchups that could be fascinating to watch. Here are five guards who have the skill and the style to challenge the 6-foot Brown—and maybe beat him. And even if they don't draw Brown and Illinois, they'll be fun to follow in March. —*Seth Davis*

## Raymond Felton

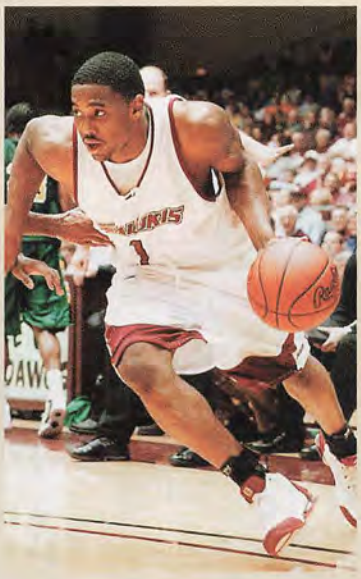
1. | JR., *North Carolina*

Brown isn't used to playing against guards who are as speedy as he is, but Felton may be even faster than Brown. And unlike Brown, Felton has a consistent post option in Sean May. If Brown has to help out on the block, he will leave Felton open from three-point land, where the Tar Heel is converting 46.8% of his attempts.

## Darren Brooks

2. | SR., *Southern Illinois*

Brooks is as unflappable as Brown is excitable. He also has plenty of NCAA tournament experience, having led the Salukis there for the last three years, including a Sweet 16 appearance in 2002. The reigning Missouri Valley Conference player of the year and defensive player of the year, Brooks led Southern Illinois through Sunday in scoring (14.4 points a game), rebounding (5.1) and steals (2.8).



MANNY MILLAN (FELTON); STEVE JAHNKE/THE SOUTHERN VIA AP (BROOKS)

No player burns our mental hard drives with more **ASTOUNDING MOVES**, the kind that make you pick up your cellphone and call a friend: "*Did you see that?*"

sense early on that Brown would have this kind of impact. When Self recruited Brown out of Proviso East High near Chicago, he told the 2002 Illinois Mr. Basketball that he'd "be like the governor" in Champaign. "My mom and I were laughing," Brown recalls. "I was just coming down to be on the team. I wasn't into all that."

Perhaps, but Self's prophecy came true. These days Brown's profile is higher than that of any Illinois politician not named Hastert or Obama—and he's rapidly gaining on those two. "Dee's the poster child of Illinois basketball," says coach Bruce Weber. "He's got the headband and the braids and the big smile. Dee can't dunk much, but if you look at the pictures from our dunk contest, he's in every one, either letting Luther jump over him or bouncing the ball so another guy can dunk or chest-bumping guys. He's got that personality."

Brown's infectious enthusiasm extends off the court, as becomes clear during a visit to the spartan off-campus apartment he shares with Head and a team manager. Brown loads a frozen pizza into the oven—somehow you expect his fuel to be more exotic, like Popeye's spinach, say, or weapons-grade plutonium—and takes his visitor on the grand tour, through the living room (and its life-sized Michael Jordan cutout), into his bedroom (with fan letters from schoolkids tacked on the walls), past the patriotic-themed bathroom (an American-flag shower curtain!) and into the room that most clearly reveals any self-respecting college athlete's sense of style.

His closet.

"All my jerseys mean something," Brown explains, unveiling two dozen meticulously hung uniform tops in a rainbow of colors. There are the always-hip throwbacks: George Gervin, Dick Butkus, Isiah Thomas. There are the white guys with street cred: Brian Urlacher and Jeremy Shockey. There are the hard-to-find twists: Allen Iverson's Georgetown gamer, Amare Stoudemire's high school jersey and Brown's alltime favorite—Jordan's 1998 All-Star threads.

## Jarrett Jack

3. | **JR.**, *Georgia Tech*

Three inches taller than Brown, the 6' 3" Jack is a tremendous defender and benefits from some of the best help defense in the country. While shouldering the Yellow Jackets' scoring load this season (15.5 points a game), he has shot a remarkable 51.2% from the floor and 41.7% from three-point range—and committed just 3.6 turnovers per game.

## Eddie Basden

4. | **SR.**, *Charlotte*

The 6' 5" Basden has the size and savvy to disrupt Brown. Not only could he force Brown into turning the ball over (at week's end Basden was third in the nation in steals, with 3.3 per game), but he could also land Brown in foul trouble with his offense. Basden has hit 41.7% of his three-pointers and was averaging 16.0 points, 8.4 rebounds and 3.7 assists.

## Rajon Rondo

5. | **FR.**, *Kentucky*

Rondo may be a freshman, but he has started every game for the Wildcats and is an efficient floor leader with a nose for the ball. Rondo doesn't score a ton (8.1 points per game), but he has a quick first step and excellent court awareness. Just as Brown feeds off Deron Williams, Rondo benefits from playing alongside another scoring point guard, Patrick Sparks.

DAVID E. KLUTHO (JACK); BRETT HANSBAUER/US PRESSWIRE (BASDEN); MANNY MILLAN (RONDO)

"He was the MVP, just *killing* in that game," Brown says, beaming with pride.

He's right: All those jerseys *do* mean something. Hanging with the others is the blue number 5 of Illini teammate Williams. What more fitting way to symbolize the solidarity of a team that shares the ball—to say nothing of the credit—better than any college outfit of the past decade? For that matter, all the players honored on Brown's closet rack have one thing in common: They're not just producers; they're also performers, crowd-pleasers, athletes you *remember*.

When Illini fans look back on their school's Season of the Century, they won't cite Brown's statistics (although his 13.8 points and 4.8 assists per game through Sunday were solid). No, they'll call to mind the indelible images he gave them: his orange mouthpiece framing a full-throated triumphant scream; his steal-and-score outburst turning the tide against Michigan; his three-pointer capping a glorious 12-pass sequence against Northwestern.

It goes without saying that many of those fans will have Brown's Illini jersey in their own closets, and maybe an orange headband and mouthpiece too—the 21st-century update to a streetball couture last jolted in the early 1990s by Michigan's Fab Five with their below-the-knee shorts and black socks. Funny, what's now seen as Brown-influenced blacktop chic actually originated out of necessity (with an assist from that other style arbiter, LeBron James). Brown started using the mouthpiece as a high school quarterback (he was good enough to draw recruiting overtures from Nebraska and Florida State), but he

# Give Them A High Five

As the focal point of the nation's top-ranked team, Dee Brown will spend much of March in the national eye, his Q rating rising by the day. Elsewhere, though, are high-excitement players with Brown-style entertainment value who will get much less attention and much less praise. Most of them have little chance of ending up in this year's Final Four. The members of the quintet pictured here were selected as SI's Favorite Players because they embody the spirit of college basketball. They work hard, play hard and make their teammates better. They exude passion and do whatever it takes to win. And they're fun to watch. For that they deserve a moment in the spotlight.

## Jose Juan Barea

1. | **GUARD,** *Northeastern*

Ever since the 1980s, when Aparicio Curry played at Detroit and Crosetti Speight at Hawaii, we've been searching for a player who doesn't just sound like a shortstop but plays like one. Northeastern point guard Jose Juan Barea is that guy. The 6-foot junior from Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, who at week's end was averaging 21.9 points and 7.2 assists for the 19–8 Huskies, moves left or right with quick, biting steps. He fearlessly goes deep into the hole of the lane. When he whips a pass to a spotted-up teammate, he does so as if he's executing a pivot at second base. When he shoots, the ball comes out of his hand with what must be the quickest accurate release in the game. Turns out that like most Puerto Ricans, Barea played his share of baseball as a kid. Any shortstop? "No," he says. "Second base." Doesn't matter. The search is over. —*Alexander Wolff*

## Chuck Hayes

2. | **FORWARD,** *Kentucky*

No player squeezes more out of his abilities than Kentucky's 6′ 6″, 242-pound senior power forward Chuck Hayes. It's no accident that the Wildcats have gone 103–22 over his four seasons. Through Sunday, Hayes was averaging 10.8 points and 8.5 rebounds and was on the verge of becoming the first player in SEC history to pile up 800 rebounds and 300 assists over his career. His hallmark is toughness: He never takes a play off. On Jan. 25 he broke his nose in an 84–62 win over Tennessee. Four days later, wearing a mask, he stepped onto the court against Arkansas, keeping his streak of consecutive starts (which had reached 102 at week's end) intact. Hayes hasn't spent his final season trying to impress NBA scouts by scoring a ton of points. But he has impressed them with his hustle and tenacity. —*Seth Davis*

DAMIAN STROHMEYER (BAREA); JOHN SOMMERS II/REUTERS (HAYES)

only began wearing it full time on the basketball court after a particularly heated game in Chicago with LeBron and his posse three years ago.

"I dove for a loose ball," Brown says, "and one of LeBron's boys jumped on the back of my head and put my tooth to the ground. After that I kept the mouthpiece in the whole time." Of such mishaps are movements born. (Check out how many orange headbands and mouthpieces you see at playground pickup games and suburban CYO contests the next time you're touring the Corn Belt.)

Brown has emerged as the ringleader of the Stylin' Illini for plenty of other reasons, not least because he never got the message that his team had to be mortal on the court. For weeks we've been hearing why the Illini should go ahead and lose a game before the NCAA tournament, as though the weight of the sport's history—29 years without a perfect national champion—will be too much for the players to bear. But what if this team really is The One? What if Weber's wrecking crew doesn't need to feel the sting of defeat to thrive in March? What if the Illini's habit of exceeding everyone's expectations (SI preseason ranking: ninth) keeps following them right to the victory podium in St. Louis on April 4? As Brown himself is fond of saying, "Why not us?"

There must be something about the name *Dee Brown* that gives its wearer such a majestic sense of theater. You still remember shoe-pumpin', eye-shieldin', 1991 NBA dunk-contest-winnin' Dee Brown, don't you? Well, take it from us: You won't forget headband-rockin', braid-sportin', every-game-winnin' Dee Brown years from now, either. □

## Derek Raivio

3. | **GUARD**, *Gonzaga*

Maybe it's the Opie buzz cut or the shoulder art, which looks as if it came straight from a Fisher Price My First Tattoo kit. But Derek Raivio doesn't exactly instill fear in opposing defenders. "They'll say, 'Who's this skinny little white boy?' " says Raivio, Gonzaga's 6' 3", 168-pound sophomore point guard. "But once they see me handle the ball, their ideas change real quick." Georgia Tech knows. In the Zags' 85–73 win over the Yellow Jackets on Dec. 18, Raivio took Jarrett Jack to the hole and scored. He also stripped Jack at half-court, and then instead of going in for an easy layup, he pulled up and hit a long-range jumper. Not only does he have strong numbers—13.6 points, 5.2 assists per game at week's end—but he's also been fearless, scoring 21 points against Georgia Tech, another 21 in a win over Washington and 32 in a triumph at Santa Clara. *—Grant Wahl*

## Turner Battle

4. | **GUARD**, *Buffalo*

His teammates call him Textbook, an apt moniker for an old-school point guard at a school that's new to winning. "I guess I'm about the fundamentals," says Buffalo senior Turner Battle. At week's end here were the fundamentals on Battle: 15.6 points and 4.4 assists per game, and a 3.56 GPA. Battle has helped give a once woebegone program postseason possibilities for the first time since it moved up to Division I in 1992. The Bulls were 14–71 in the three years before Battle's arrival in 2001; they were 35–19 over the past two seasons and 18–7 this year. When Battle signed with Buffalo out of East Forsyth High in Kernersville, N.C., four years ago, recruiting guru Bob Gibbons called him "the steal of the millennium." We call him the best thing to happen to Buffalo since the invention of the snowplow. *—Richard Deitsch*

## Ike Diogu

5. | **FORWARD**, *Arizona State*

There's a reason why longtime observers of the Arizona State athletic program compare Ike Diogu with late football star Pat Tillman. The two have shared not just surpassing talent but also an almost regal combination of dignity and respect. We could go on for hours about the 6' 8" junior forward's sculpted physique, his cash-money midrange jumper, his psyche-smashing blocked shots. He was leading the Pac-10 in *five* of its 13 individual statistical categories through Sunday, for God's sake. But Diogu is one of our favorite players just as much for what he doesn't do. Once when Diogu was being roughed up by his defender, Arizona State coach Rob Evans asked him to tell the referee about it. Diogu returned to the game and never said a word. It may have been the only time he has ever disobeyed orders, but it's more evidence of why we like Ike. —G.W.

DARRON CUMMINGS/AP (RAIVIO); JIM ROGASH/WIREIMAGE.COM (BATTLE); SCOTT WACHTER/ICON SMI (DIOGU)

# The No. 1 Question

## Who will the 49ers take with the first pick in the NFL draft? At the scouting combine nothing was obvious. SI slots the top four from a pool devoid of can't-miss players

**BY PETER KING**

*Photograph by* Peter Read Miller

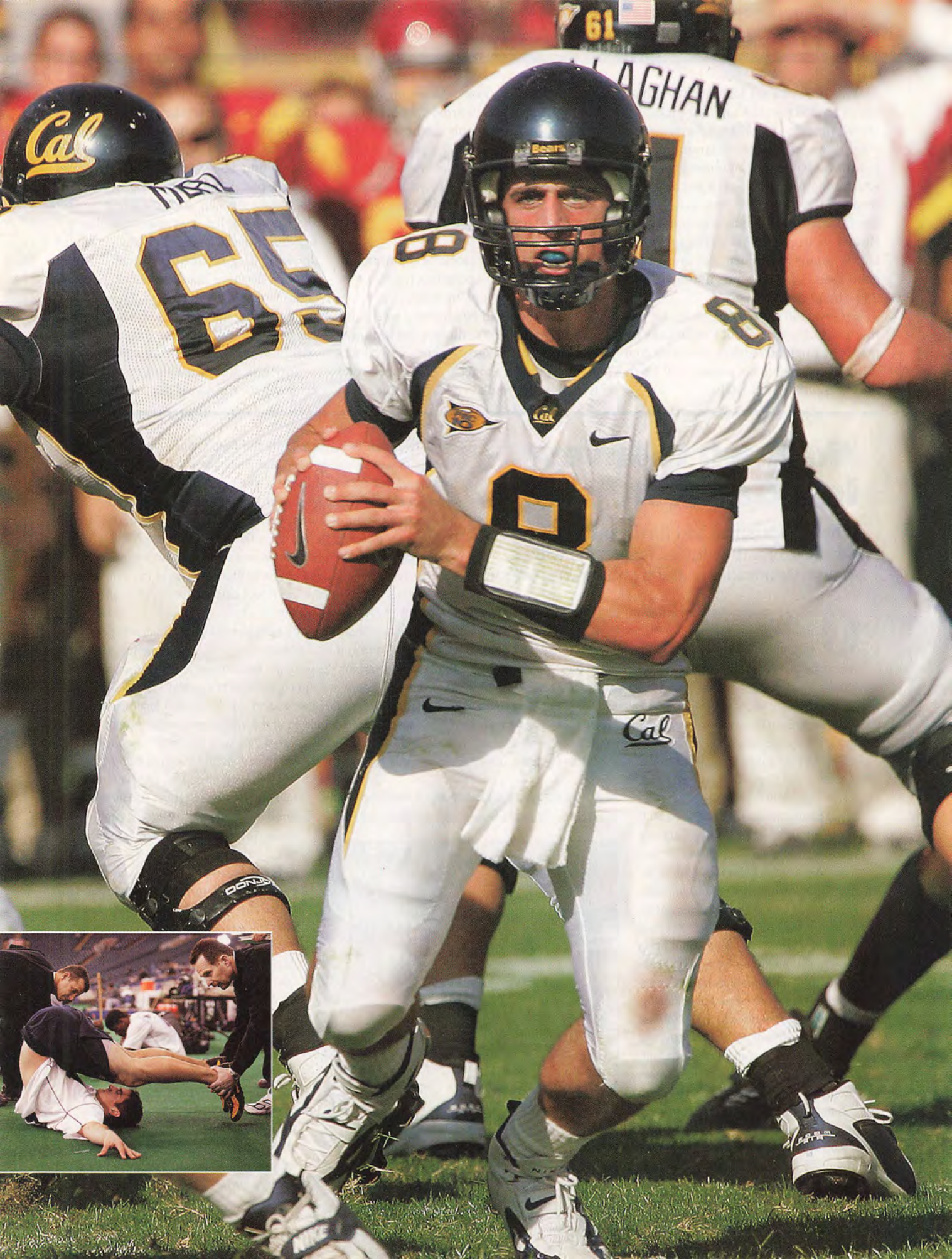
WITH THE arrival of March the fun begins for NFL draftniks. And every year at this time they either know who the No. 1 pick will be (Jeff George, Michael Vick, Carson Palmer) or the pool of quality candidates is so rich (David Carr and Julius Peppers, Eli Manning and Robert Gallery) that the team selecting first is certain to get a cornerstone player. ¶ That's why the upcoming draft is so weird—and why the San Francisco 49ers and their new coach, Mike Nolan, are in a tough spot. There isn't a can't-miss player on the board. "I don't remember a year like this," Buffalo Bills president Tom Donahoe said last week at the NFL scouting combine in Indianapolis. "I've talked to 10 people, and I've gotten 10 different answers on who they like at the top. It makes it hard on San Francisco. If the 49ers don't want the pick, it might be hard for them to trade it."

A year ago who would have thought that the names being bandied about at the top of the draft would be Ronnie Brown, Braylon Edwards, Aaron Rodgers and Alex Smith? At the same time who would have thought that the biggest power brokers in this draft would be Nolan, Scot McCloughan, Nick Saban, Romeo Crennel and Phil Savage? And what would the odds have been that the most famous player in the draft, Maurice Clarett, wouldn't be selected?

That's the 2005 draft in a nutshell. It's like The Gates. You're not sure what to make of it, but you know you haven't seen anything like it.

**THIRD DEGREE** Rodgers (8, last season) was (from left) timed, interviewed (by the 49ers) and tested for flexibility as he went through the rigors of the scouting combine.

TODD ROSENBERG (3)


Cal
Bears
61
AGHAN
8
Cal

With the draft set for April 23 and 24, here's how SI sees the top four picks:

•San Francisco exhausts all attempts to trade down, then reaches around the corner for Rodgers, the Cal quarterback.

•Assuming he doesn't get a running back through free agency or in a trade, Saban, the Miami Dolphins' new coach, selects Brown, who split time with Carnell (Cadillac) Williams at Auburn. Brown has very good speed (4.47 seconds in the 40) for a 233-pound back.

•The Cleveland Browns aren't in love with this quarterback crop, but Crennel, the former New England Patriots defensive coordinator, has to have a passer. It'll be the mobile Smith, out of Utah.

•If any player is a lock to be among the first four picks, it's Edwards, the Michigan wideout. "He's probably the best player in the draft," Nolan says. The pick is held by the Chicago Bears, but last Saturday they signed free-agent All-Pro wide receiver Muhsin Muhammad to a six-year deal. The Bears will trade the pick.

"YOU'RE ON the clock," a reporter said to Nolan in Indianapolis last week.

"That's pretty cool," he said.

The 46-year-old Nolan, who was Baltimore's defensive coordinator the last three seasons, was the surprise choice of Niners owner John York to resurrect a once-proud franchise that sank to a league-worst 2–14 last season. Nolan has never been a head coach at any level, and he's never worked as a personnel man in a front office, but he will have the final say in the San Francisco draft room. The bookish Nolan may not look the part, but he's a bulldog. Working in the coaches' booth during a game against the New York Jets last season, Nolan got upset at Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis for showing disgust at his play calls. Nolan phoned down to inside linebackers coach Mike Singletary and barked, "You tell Ray to stop giving me an attitude. That impacts the other guys. That's not going to help us win." Lewis dropped the attitude.

York has gotten the lion's share of the criticism for the 49ers' demise, and Nolan

# No Rush to Invest In a Bad Act

## When the Vikings had finally had their fill of Randy Moss, they found few teams willing to discuss a trade for the troublesome wideout

ONE BY ONE over the past month, potential partners in a trade with the Minnesota Vikings for wideout Randy Moss turned their backs to the opportunity. The New York Jets, who pursued a deal for Moss in 2003, no longer had interest in the game's most controversial superstar. Atlanta needs a deep threat for quarterback Michael Vick, but the Falcons wanted nothing to do with Moss. Even the receiver-poor Baltimore Ravens, who last March thought they had swung a trade for outspoken wideout Terrell Owens, refused Minnesota's demand for one of two Pro Bowl players, pass rusher Terrell Suggs or safety Ed Reed, as part of a deal for Moss.

In the end there was only one club seriously interested in the explosive Moss, a seven-year veteran who scored more touchdowns before his 28th birthday (90) than any other receiver in NFL history but was an equally disruptive force in Minnesota. The Oakland Raiders gave the Vikings their first-round draft pick (No. 7 overall), starting linebacker Napoleon Harris and a seventh-round pick. Barring an unlikely last-minute roadblock, that deal was to become official on Wednesday, the first day of the league's trading period. Moss was one step from joining an organization that not only loves the deep passing game but also is notorious for collecting renegades.

For Minnesota no amount of kowtowing to Moss could prevent his insubordination, much of which occurred publicly—such as when he left the field before the end of the Vikings' loss at Washington on Jan. 2—but also included more subtle acts of defiance that hurt the team. For instance, after Moss dropped a touchdown pass against the Chicago Bears on Dec. 5, quarterback Daunte Culpepper hooked up with wideout Nate Burleson for a score. "Randy felt snubbed," recalls one Viking. "He came to the sideline, threw his helmet down, and his negative energy hit everyone on the team. He pouted the rest of the game. He was useless." Moss finished with four catches for 31 yards, and the Bears pulled off a 24–14 upset.

Minnesota authority figures, from owner Red McCombs to coaches Dennis Green and then Mike Tice, had become enablers rather than disciplinarians. Even when Moss tried to right a wrong, he screwed up. He privately apologized to the embattled Tice for his early departure in Washington and told the coach he'd apologize again later in the week in front of the media. Instead, later that week Moss told ESPN he wasn't sure if Tice was the right coach for the Vikings, saying, "I don't know if it's a good fit for him to be here."

**BLACK-AND-SILVER LINING** Moss wound up with the Raiders, the one team that might be a perfect fit.

TOM DAHLIN/WIREIMAGE.COM

Minnesota didn't hit the jackpot in making the trade, but the Raiders took another big step in rebuilding their offense. They already had one fleet wideout, Jerry Porter, who will keep opponents from keying on Moss, and last year they picked up a strong-armed quarterback, Kerry Collins. Now Oakland will either draft a running back or sign a free agent to boost a ground game that ranked last in the league in 2004. With Moss and Porter in the lineup, defenses will have to keep one or two safeties in deep coverage, which should open up the field for the rushing attack.

All the Raiders expect from Moss are numbers comparable to his average over seven seasons: 82 catches, 1,306 yards, 13 touchdowns. Even if the trade doesn't change his behavior one bit, at least he's with the NFL franchise that has the best track record with misfits. —P.K.

Running with scissors still isn't safe, but we're working on it.

From bottled water to dietary supplements, the range and scope of products we certify is expanding every day. Put another way, we're making the world a safer place—every day. NSF International helps protect you by certifying products and writing standards for food, water, air and consumer goods. To learn how NSF can help make your family, your home or your business safer, contact us for a free CD-ROM at **1-888-99-SAFER or visit www.nsf.org.**

NSF®

Live safer.™

spent part of his interview with the owner pressing him for answers on why the team went south so fast. After Nolan got the job in January, he recalls, York told him, "You're the only [candidate] who attacked me. I liked that."

Likewise, Nolan's choice to be his top personnel aide, the 33-year-old McCloughan, who was the Seattle Seahawks' director of college scouting, caught everyone by surprise. Nolan spent just 30 minutes with McCloughan before hiring him. "He was a complete stranger," Nolan says, "and he's going to make or break me. But he came very highly recommended, and I knew he was the guy when I asked him what he looked for in football players, and he said, 'Passion, football intelligence and being a playmaker.' That's what I look for."

Beyond the notion that San Francisco will draft a quarterback first, the Nolan-McCloughan draft board is a mystery. The Niners' starting signal-caller, Tim Rattay, a seventh-round pick in 2000, has been mostly ineffective and plagued by injury during his 1½ seasons in the lineup. The 49ers' options were narrowed after Heisman Trophy winner Matt Leinart announced in January that he would return to Southern Cal for his senior season. Now Rodgers and Smith, both of whom had a year of eligibility left, will get long looks from Nolan and McCloughan. Barring a lucrative offer from a team looking to move up to take Edwards or a running back, one of those quarterbacks is about to hit the lottery. "It looks like it's down to me and Aaron," Smith said at the combine.

Both rose out of college football obscurity and California towns. Smith, from LaMesa, is a wiry (6' 4", 217) kid who's probably the most intelligent player in the draft. Still only 20, he got his economics degree in two years. As a sophomore he capitalized on an injury to the Utes' incumbent in the second game of the season and never gave the job back. In two seasons as a starter he rushed for 1,072 yards, completed 66.3% of his passes, went 21–1 and had a touchdown-to-interception ratio of 47 to 8. The book on his arm: excellent touch on short and intermediate passes, throws an average deep ball that sometimes flutters. "I think what separates me from other quarterbacks," Smith says, "is my athleticism, leadership and intelligence."

What separates Rodgers, who grew up in Chico, is his confidence. In high school he refused to believe the college scouts who said he wasn't Division I material; he went to junior college for two years, then signed with Cal and went 17–5 as a starter. Unlike other Jeff Tedford–coached quarterbacks, Rodgers is an accurate passer (63.8% completion rate) who isn't hesitant about making any throw. "I think I'm a guy you can build a franchise around," he says. But he'll have to overcome the reputation of other Tedford-coached quarterbacks—Trent Dilfer at Fresno State, Akili Smith and Joey Harrington at Oregon, and Kyle Boller at Cal—who after putting up impressive college numbers have been far less successful in the pros. "When I interviewed with the Packers," says Rodgers, "they killed me on that stuff. They asked me, 'How are you different from Harrington?' And, 'Are you just a Tedford product?' It's frustrating. I think I'm the most accurate quarterback Coach Tedford ever had."

The 49ers interviewed Rodgers and Smith at the combine. "I liked them both a lot," says Nolan. "Aaron doesn't ride the fence on anything, which I like. People don't follow fence-sitters. Alex is very smart, very capable. He sees the target and knows what he has to do. My job is to figure out if he can be a great one."

Saban and Crennel, who worked under the secretive Bill Belichick in Cleveland and New England, respectively, won't be offering clues on which way they're leaning with the second and third picks. Brown's speed and squeaky-clean image would seem to give him an edge as the Dolphins' running back choice over Williams and Texas' Cedric Benson (both of whom should go in the top 10). Though they need a quarterback, Crennel and Savage, the former Ravens director of player personnel who is now the Browns' general manager, may choose the best player (Edwards) or an impact defensive player (Wisconsin pass rusher Erasmus James or West Virginia cornerback Adam Jones). After all, Crennel has seen firsthand how a passer drafted in the sixth round, Tom Brady, can be molded into a champion.

**SETBACK** Clarett showed up in better shape than he did in '04, but his stock fell after he turned in 40 times more befitting a tight end.

FINALLY THERE'S Clarett, who hasn't played in a game in 26 months, after dropping out of Ohio State and losing his bid to have NFL draft rules overturned in court. He participated in last year's combine before an appeals court ruled in favor of the NFL. This year he returned to Indianapolis far more fit, his body fat down from 17.0% last year to 11.4%. But then he ran tight-end-like 40 times of 4.72 and 4.82. Three seasons ago, when Clarett was tearing up the Big Ten during a freshman year in which he scored 16 touchdowns, it would have been ridiculous to suggest he would someday be a sixth-round draft choice. Now, that's probably a best-case scenario.

> "I don't remember a year like this. I've talked to 10 people, and I've gotten **10 DIFFERENT ANSWERS** about who they like at the top," said the Bills' Tom Donahoe.

Before his Saturday workout he said, "This is the date I've had circled on my calendar for a long time." After running poorly, he was so crushed that he pulled out of the rest of the running back drills, further diminishing his worth. Asked about his dismal 40 times, Clarett said, "I can't explain it."

That's goes for the rest of the 2005 draft. □

TODD ROSENBERG

# The Week Ahead

## What to watch and watch for **By Amanda Cherrin**

**FRIDAY 4**

**Davis Cup, First Round, U.S. vs. Croatia ESPN2 4 p.m.** | After a five-year hiatus Andre Agassi is back with the Yanks. **Cavaliers at 76ers 7 p.m.** | Super soph LeBron James takes on the league's newest dynamic duo: Chris Webber and Allen Iverson.

**SATURDAY 5**

**Iditarod** | The 1,150-mile race begins in downtown Anchorage. Among the 79 mushers: Rachael Scdoris, 19 and legally blind. **SI FOR KIDS: Next Snow Search NBC 2 p.m.** | The quest to find America's top junior skiers and snowboarders ends in Keystone, Colo.

**SUNDAY 6**

**Cycling, Paris-Nice OLN 5 p.m.** | Lance Armstrong makes his debut with his new Discovery Channel team. **L.A. Marathon 10:30 a.m.** | A live webcast of more than 25,000 runners clogging the downtown streets is available at NBC4.tv.

**MONDAY 7**

***Match Makers: Agents* Tennis Channel 7 p.m.** | Meet Andy Roddick's agent, Ken Myerson. Then see Roddick hit *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* on NBC at 11:35 p.m. **Yankees at Red Sox NESN 7 p.m.** | Not your average Grapefruit League affair.

**TUESDAY 8**

**On this date** | In 1971, Joe Frazier defended his heavyweight title with a unanimous decision over Muhammad Ali—the Greatest's first loss in 32 pro bouts. ***Who's #1? Worst Teams* ESPN Classic 8 p.m.** | Amazingly, there are 18 worse than Rich Kotite's '96 1–15 Jets.

**WEDNESDAY 9**

**NCAA Skiing Championships** | Last year New Mexico dominated the slopes in winning the school's first NCAA title in any sport. Led by returning All-Americas Martina Stursova and Lars Loeseth in the coed meet, the Lobos are out to repeat in Stowe, Vt.

**THURSDAY 10**

**PGA Honda Classic USA 4 p.m.** | Sophomore Todd Hamilton defends his first Tour title at the Country Club at Mirasol in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. **ACC Tournament ESPN 7 p.m.** | Three of the nation's top seven teams will be at the MCI Center in Washington, D.C.

JESSE D. GARRABRANT/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (IVERSON AND WEBBER); E BAY (BOXING POSTER); AL MESSERSCHMIDT/WIREIMAGE.COM (HAMILTON); COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO (LOESETH); DAVID CALLOW (RODDICK); AMERICAN IMAGES, INC./GETTY IMAGES (HUSKY)

# Under Review

**"Boogity, boogity,** boogity! Let's go racing, boys!" Delivered as if he'd just swallowed a whooping crane, analyst Darrell Waltrip's signature call is the opening bell of NASCAR races on Fox. And it's the start of *Darrell Waltrip: His Passion Beyond the Wheel*, a new DVD about the shrewd competitor who came onto the scene as a cocky upstart in the 1970s (he was nicknamed Jaws because his never stopped moving) and became one of the most popular drivers by the time he retired in 2000, along the way winning 84 races and three Winston Cup titles. Produced by NASCAR Images, *Passion* is more tribute than documentary. His private life is standard fare: His family made sacrifices so he could race; he and his wife, Stevie, had more dreams than dollars when first married; he mellowed after becoming a dad. Interviews with Richard Petty and Rusty Wallace are too brief. (Petty's comment that some of Waltrip's driving tactics were questionable only whets the appetite for details.) But the on-track footage is gripping. And his relationship with Dale Earnhardt—on the track the two of them were dog-eat-dog, but in the late 1990s it was Earnhardt who offered Waltrip a comeback ride in one of the cars he owned—is presented movingly and without unnecessary sentiment. —*Nancy Ramsey*

Wendy's OLD FASHIONED HAMBURGERS

late night lounge™ & tbs present Very Funny™ One-Liners

WHO SAID:

"Sorry folks the park's closed. The moose outside should have told you."

Identify movie quotes and you could win one of over 100 instant prizes! And enter for a chance to win the GRAND PRIZE:

A Home Entertainment System Worth $5000

Enter today at:
wendyslatenightlounge.com

TUNE IN TO
WENDY'S LATE NIGHT LOUNGE™
Movies every Monday night at 11PM/10C

tbs very funny

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. Sweepstakes open to all legal residents of the 50 United States and the District of Columbia, age 18 or older who have Internet access as of December 26, 2004. Sweepstakes ends at 8:59:59 AM ET on March 22, 2005. Subject to Official Rules at http://www.wendyslatenightlounge.com or AOL Keyword: Wendy'sLNL. Void in Puerto Rico and where prohibited. Florida residents only: full rules listed in back of this issue.

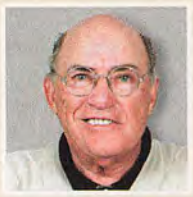
National Lampoon's Vacation airs 2/28/05 on TBS.
"TBS," "Very Funny" and "Late Night Lounge" are trademarks of Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. A Time Warner Company. All Rights Reserved. © 2004 Oldemark LLC. The Wendy's name, design and logo are trademarks of Oldemark, LLC and are licensed to Wendy's International, Inc.



GOOD SPORTS EDITION

# Faces in the Crowd

In the tradition of SI's Sportsman of the Year, we periodically pay tribute in this space to men and women who represent the ideals of sportsmanship



## Marvin Rogoff

BOCA RATON, FLA.

Rogoff, 77, a retired garment-industry executive, has collected 26,000 clubs for Golf Fore Kids, which he founded in 1999 to provide clubs for underfunded school and youth programs. He has given clubs to the Special Olympics and more than 25 other organizations in 42 states.

## Katie O'Keefe

DOVER, N.H.

O'Keefe, 23, a Spanish and humanities teacher and girls' basketball coach at St. Thomas Aquinas High, spent the past two summers in Tarija, Bolivia, working on construction projects with the Center for Student Leadership. The group enlarged the Zuriel School and built a basketball court.

## B.J. Viau

APPLE VALLEY, MINN.

B.J., a senior guard on the basketball team at Eastview High, hosts his eighth annual Hoop-a-thon on March 6 to raise money to fight Huntington's disease. He started the free throw contest after his mother, Debbie, was diagnosed with the genetic disorder. The event has raised nearly $300,000.

## Will Conroy

CHARLOTTE

Conroy, 22, an assistant editor for Street & Smith's, an assistant football coach at Charlotte Country Day School and a former All-Ivy center at Yale, raised more than $3,000 in pledges to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society by running in the Walt Disney World Marathon.

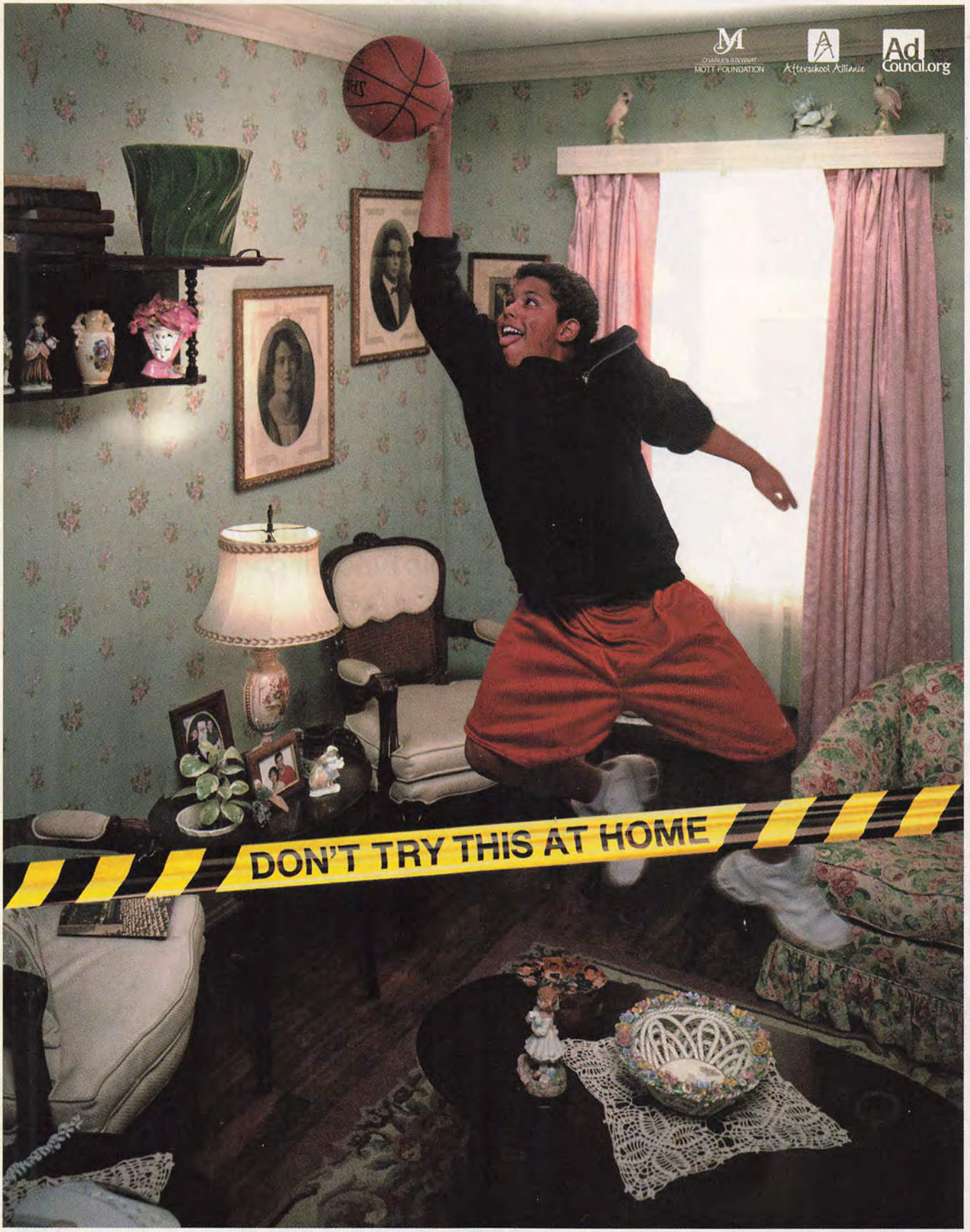
## Mark Garratt and Peter Grant

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, CALIF.

Garratt and Grant, both 49-year-old businessmen, headed up a drive that raised $200,000 to save South Tahoe High and Middle School sports programs for the current academic year after a tax to support those activities was voted down. If the school board implements a pay-to-play program next year, as expected, the men's group, the South Tahoe Athletic Team, will offer sports scholarships to less affluent students.

To submit a candidate for our new Faces in the Crowd section, honoring sportsmanship and contributions to the community, go to **SI.com/faces.**

FROM TOP: W.T. HARRINGTON; GENE PALTRINERI; TERRY FAUST; MICHAEL T. MYERS; JIM GRANT (2)




AFTERSCHOOLSCENE.COM

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS ARE A WAY BETTER PLACE

# A Winning Hand?

Having discarded a pair of aces, the **Oakland A's** are wagering that general manager **Billy Beane** picked the right time for his boldest gamble yet

**BY DANIEL G. HABIB**

*Photographs by* Brad Mangin

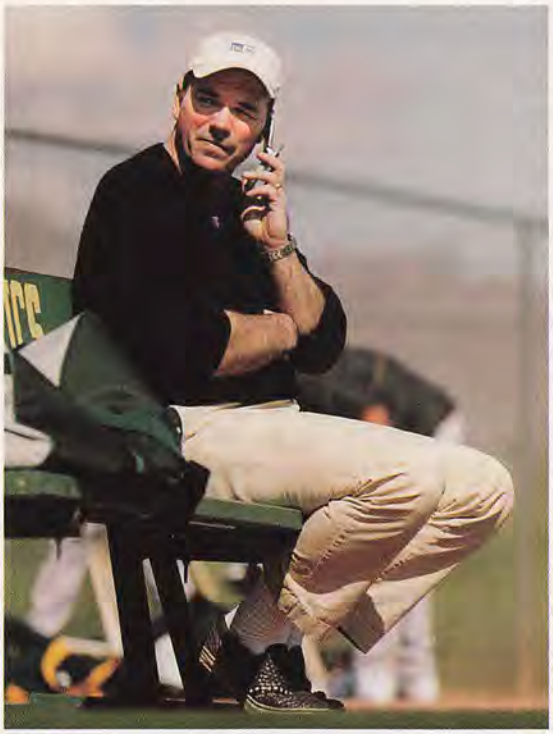
**TAKING IT ALL IN STRIDE** Harden (foreground) becomes Oakland's No. 2 starter, while the newly acquired Yabu will work out of the bullpen or in the rotation.

ON THE SECOND floor of Tim Hudson's waterfront house in Apollo Beach, Fla., just off the main staircase, is a cluttered trophy room. It's thick with the flotsam of a ballplayer's life: cabinets stocked with rows of autographed baseballs, dating back 10 years to Hudson's junior college days at Chattahoochee Valley Community College, in Phenix City, Ala.; myriad bobblehead dolls, mostly of teammates, two of himself; framed lineup cards and photographs. (Here is Hudson, right elbow resting on Babe Ruth's pillar in Yankee Stadium's Monument Park, on the afternoon before his eight shutout innings in Game 2 of the 2001 American League Division Series.) And on the rear wall, above a billiard table, hangs an oil painting by Vernon Wells Sr., father of the Toronto Blue Jays centerfielder, of the righthanded Hudson and lefties Mark Mulder and Barry Zito, all three mid-windup, all three wearing Oakland A's green and gold.

"Good thing I got it last season," Hudson said, smiling, to a recent visitor. Like the rest of the things in the room, it has become a relic in a quickly receding past: On Dec. 16 Hudson, who had spent all six of his major league seasons with Oakland, was traded to the Atlanta Braves; three days later Mulder, his rotationmate for five seasons, was shipped to the St. Louis Cardinals. In that short span the A's dismantled their greatest weapon and reconfigured the face of the franchise. "They were our identity," says first baseman Scott Hatteberg. "Every friggin' piece of marketing we had had three players on it."

The explanation that fits on a cocktail napkin, and the one most commonly offered in the wake of the deals, was that Hudson, who'll earn $6.75 million this year before becoming eligible for free agency, and Mulder, who'll make $6 million with a $7.25 million option for '06 before hitting the market himself, had become too costly for Oakland's limited means, which provide for a payroll of about $60 million. Like a host of elite players before them—first baseman Jason Giambi and shortstop Miguel Tejada, to name two who departed after winning MVP awards—the pair was destined to leave the East Bay to sign the lucrative contracts that they had earned there.

But whereas A's general manager Billy Beane had usually been content, as in the cases of Giambi and Tejada, to wring the last years of service from his young talent and accept draft picks as compensation, he changed tracks this winter. In essence Beane preempted—to borrow a term now in vogue in foreign policy circles and favored by several members of the Oakland brain trust—an imminent financial crisis, surrendering three years' worth of dividends for immediate help. The consensus around baseball has the A's dead and buried, with preemption the cause.



**TRADER BILLY** Beane reasoned that when it came to fortifying his starting pitching, there was no better time than the present.

"Nothing wrong with it if you're a neocon," roars Beane, who showed in Michael Lewis's 2003 best-seller *Moneyball* that he's equal parts earthy and wonkish.

"Preemptive is always uncomfortable for people," he continues. "But understand, if we do a move when everyone else thinks we should, we've waited too long. When you're a small-market team, an economically challenged team, and you hit bottom, it takes a long time to get out. You hit last place with a thud, not a bounce."

Oakland proceeded with the trades on the assumption that given the existing market for starting pitching and the 29-year-old Hudson's impeccable résumé (a 92–39 record and a 3.30 ERA in more than 1,200 innings), a contract extension was not an option. With about six weeks left in the regular season, the front office was already conceding Hudson's departure; at that point the idea of trading another of the Big Three arose almost instantly. This was a radical insight because it was the second deal, trading the 27-year-old Mulder, that was most surprising.

"The Hudson trade, there were rumors that it was likely to happen," says Canadian-born righthander Rich Harden, 23, now Oakland's No. 2 starter, who learned about the deals in a phone call from his father, Russ, while visiting family in Winnipeg. "And when the Mulder trade went down, that was a shock. I don't think anybody in a million years thought it would have happened, to get rid of both of them."

BEANE AND his lieutenants, including assistant G.M. David Forst, believed that the roster required wholesale change to remain sustainable and competitive in the long term; only moving two premier but soon to be high-priced pitchers could accomplish that goal and forestall the talent void that would have arisen after the '06 season, by which time all three would have been gone. (It's possible that Zito, 26, who will make $4.8 million this year with a club option for $7 million in '06, will also price himself out of Oakland's budget before he hits free agency.)

Offensive players are mostly fungible, Beane believes, which is why he was content to let the likes of Giambi and Tejada walk in exchange for draft picks. But constructing a rotation entirely from free agents or low-level prospects proves either too costly or too speculative. "It's impossible to re-create a starting staff from free agency because the economics won't allow us to do it," Beane says. "An average major league pitcher in this market was anywhere between $6 and $10 million a year, and we can't afford even one of those guys

## GENERATION NEXT

With Tim Hudson and Mark Mulder gone, the A's are hoping that these four young starters, along with 26-year-old Barry Zito, can carry them.

**RICH HARDEN, 23**
*Went 8–2 with 3.49 ERA after All-Star break last season; must cut down rate of 3.84 walks per nine innings.*

**DANNY HAREN, 24**
*Armed with hard splitter, led Pacific Coast League with 150 K's; Oakland likes his playoff chops (1–0, 2.16 ERA in 8⅓ IP with Cardinals).*

**JOE BLANTON, 24**
*Second to Haren in PCL with 143 K's; spent winter honing circle change that travels 78–80 mph, 12 mph slower than fastball.*

**DAN MEYER, 23**
*A's wonder how they missed lefty with off-the-charts peripheral stats in '02 draft; no ERA higher than 2.87 at any minor league stop.*

at that number. We have to make sure if we lose guys, we have somebody to step in right away."

So in negotiations with Hudson's and Mulder's suitors, the A's made the acquisition of rotation-ready pitchers their first priority and obtained their top choice in each deal: Braves lefthander Dan Meyer, the presumptive fifth starter, and Cardinals righthander Danny Haren, the third. In the statistical indicators that most matter to the A's, Haren and Meyer, strike-throwers with college experience, are virtual clones. Haren, 24, a 2001 second-round draft pick out of Pepperdine, has made 73 minor league starts, and last season, in 128 innings at Triple A Memphis, struck out 10.5 batters per nine innings with a strikeout-to-walk ratio of 4.5. Meyer, 23, an '02 first-rounder from James Madison, has made 65 minor league starts, and in 126⅓ innings split between Double A Greenville and Triple A Richmond last season struck out 10.4 per nine innings, with a strikeout-to-walk ratio of 3.9.

Like righthander Joe Blanton, 24, who tentatively slots in between them as the fourth starter, Haren and Meyer have moved quickly through their organizations' systems, are young enough to still possess upside and, most important, are 0–3s—players with fewer than three years of major league service time who are not yet arbitration-eligible and thus earn close to the $300,000 minimum salary. In those three pitchers, plus Harden, who last year went 11–7 with a 3.99 ERA in his first full major league season, the A's envision a cost-controlled nucleus that will remain in place for several seasons.

The second notion that informed the trades was that given the youth of the new staff, the relative cost of relievers versus starters and the shoddiness of the Oakland bullpen in the first half of 2004 (its 28 blown saves tied for most in the American League), the pitching staff ought to be constructed back-to-front. Beane sought to complement 31-year-old closer Octavio Dotel with relievers who, again, tend toward high strikeout rates and good control and, of greater significance, can throw multiple innings. Oakland's targets were righthander Juan Cruz of Atlanta (22 of his 50 appearances last season exceeded three outs, and he struck out 8.8 per nine innings) and righthander Kiko Calero of St. Louis (11 of 41 appearances of more than one inning, 9.3 K's per nine). The A's got both in the Hudson and Mulder deals. Also 0–3s, Cruz and Calero represent a substantial upgrade over 34-year-old Jim Mecir, who averaged less than one inning per outing, and 35-year-old Arthur Rhodes (5.12 ERA in 38⅔ innings), and they will minimize the demands on Dotel, whom the A's would prefer to restrict to three- or four-out saves as often as possible.

> "Preemptive is always uncomfortable for people," Beane says, "but if we do a move when everyone else **THINKS WE SHOULD**, we've waited too long."

For reasons of caution and confidence-building Oakland's putative three rookie starters will not be asked to work deep into games; they will be backed by a strong bullpen that also has fallback rotation options, such as righthanders Seth Etherton, Kirk Saarloos and Keiichi Yabu. "Their youth is a concern," manager Ken Macha says of his new starters. "That's why we're going to get seven starters ready. That's why our bullpen is built the way it is. Last year it was like, Who are our emergency guys? We really didn't have the options we do this year." Along with catcher Jason Kendall, a respected handler of pitchers and a solid offensive performer obtained from the Pittsburgh Pirates for disaffected (and unwanted) lefties Rhodes and Mark Redman (11–12, 4.71), the roster design mitigates the risks inherent in Oakland's youth-oriented approach. (And the A's were only able to take on the majority of the $34 million owed Kendall over the next three years by dealing Hudson and Mulder.)

OAKLAND'S ABILITY to remain in the playoff hunt until last season's penultimate game, despite losing Hudson for six weeks in midsummer (strained oblique) and enduring a dreadful second half from Mul-

der (6.13 ERA after the All-Star break), reinforced the front office's conviction that it could build a competitive team without that pair of aces. And though Beane disagrees with this assessment, the fact that the A's missed the postseason for the first time since 1999 leavened what would have been an implied pressure to keep the roster intact and make another run.

But Beane also recalls the club's error of '92, when, following an AL West title, it re-signed pricey free agents like Ron Darling, Mark McGwire, Ruben Sierra and Terry Steinbach to long-term deals, though both he and G.M. Sandy Alderson knew rebuilding better suited the situation. "We knew in our gut what the right thing to do was," says Beane, then an Oakland scout, "but we made an emotional decision. And emotional decisions can be devastating." Six consecutive sub-.500 seasons ensued.

Though they will not punt '05, the A's have sacrificed a great deal and are almost certainly worse in the near term. Since 2000, when Zito became the last of the Big Three to debut, the troika accounted for 61% of the innings thrown by Oakland starters and 66% of their wins. Hudson, Mulder and Zito's combined ERA was 3.54 over that span, compared with 4.61 for all other Oakland starters. In an optimistic scenario Haren and Meyer will supply two thirds of the 414⅓ innings that Mulder and Hudson did. Nor is the absence of two equally savvy veterans negligible, both as mentors and teachers. After Harden joined the A's two years ago, Mulder immediately invited him to stay, rent-free, at his home in Alamo, Calif., along with infielders Mark Ellis and Frank Menechino. The two pitchers chewed long and hard over starts, and last September, after Harden was bombed for seven runs in 4⅓ innings at Toronto, Mulder alerted him that he'd been tipping his off-speed pitches, making an upward motion with his hands before coming to the set position when he threw his change and his splitter.

Says Blanton, who had a three-game cup of coffee last September, "Anytime you can be around such good pitchers, sit and watch them go about their work, their starts, how they look at scouting reports—even the three weeks I was there, it helped." Yet the moves have emboldened Zito, who despite a raggedy performance last season (11–11, 4.48) appears confident this spring. As he says of the trades, "They're old. I'm prepared to do whatever it takes to lead this team now." It also augurs well that Zito, the one retained, is the one among the Big Three who has never visited the disabled list.

The impression the A's players give is of some incredulity, tempered by faith in Beane. "People I talked to this winter were like, 'What the hell? They floated our boat, what are we doing getting rid of them?' " Hatteberg says. "But everybody finished up by saying, 'How can you argue with Billy?' It's not blind faith either. He's lost big names in the past and done well."

Public reaction has played out much the same way. Tyler Bleszinski, a 33-year-old A's fan in Sacramento who runs a heavily trafficked blog, athleticsnation.com, posted a lengthy interview with Beane elucidating the trades in January. "There was an initial emotional shock, like losing a family member, but Billy made these moves, and the theme of our site is, In Billy we trust," Bleszinski says. (Through his site Bleszinski has sold some 200 custom-designed T-shirts bearing that slogan, at $16.50 apiece.) "Opinion was 60–40 in favor of the trades, then once Billy did the interview, people saw the thinking behind it and came around. Now it's 90–10."

Beane professes that he's flattered by the support and laughs at the canard, popular among his many and vociferous detractors, that breaking up the Big Three will expose the fallacy of his quantitative methods or that the coming season is an acid test. "The acid test was after Giambi left, after Tejada left," he says. "If people are holding their breath and waiting for us not to win 90 games, guess what? At some point it's going to happen. My job is to make sure we're still a healthy business and poised to get back there." □

## THE NUMBERS GAME

Four other general managers who, like Oakland's Billy Beane, rely heavily on quantitative analysis in player evaluations, had varied off-seasons. Here's a recap of what they did.

### PAUL DEPODESTA
DODGERS

**Key moves:** signed OF J.D. Drew (five years, $55 million), 2B Jeff Kent (two years, $17 million), RHP Derek Lowe (four years, $36 million)

**Analysis:** Loosed from financial restrictions in Oakland, Beane's former assistant spent freely, adding two power bats—Drew and Kent combined for 58 homers and 136 extra-base hits—to an offense that ranked eighth in the NL in slugging and total bases and ninth in runs, and also lost MVP candidate Adrian Beltre. But can Drew stay healthy for a second straight year?

### THEO EPSTEIN
RED SOX

**Key moves:** signed SS Edgar Renteria (four years, $40 million), RHP Matt Clement (three years, $25.5 million), LHP David Wells (two years, $8 million)

**Analysis:** Renteria is a defensive upgrade over Nomar Garciaparra, but his '04 dips in on-base (.327) and slugging percentage (.401) should give pause. Clement and Wells make the rotation the league's best in terms of strike-throwing and control. The expected starters (including Curt Schilling, Tim Wakefield and Bronson Arroyo) averaged 7.0 Ks and 2.2 walks per nine innings.

### J.P. RICCIARDI
BLUE JAYS

**Key moves:** signed 3B Corey Koskie (three years, $17 million); lost 1B Carlos Delgado to free agency

**Analysis:** After an unexpected last-place finish in the AL East, Toronto moved modestly, adding Koskie (25 homers, .495 slugging) as a power lefty bat in the middle of the order. Eric Hinske, whose free fall since his '02 Rookie of the Year season is a head-scratcher, moves from third to first. More flexibility is coming: Team owner Rogers Communications has approved $210 million in payroll over the next three seasons.

### MARK SHAPIRO
INDIANS

**Key moves:** signed RHP Kevin Millwood (one year, $3 million), OF Juan Gonzalez (one year, $600,000); traded for LHP Arthur Rhodes

**Analysis:** Shapiro minimized risk with incentive-laden deals for Millwood, who took a beating in Philadelphia (4.85 ERA, 155 hits in 141 innings), and Gonzalez, a cipher in Kansas City. Both could still be productive, but Rhodes (5.12 ERA with Oakland) is hardly the answer for a bullpen that was the main stumbling block to Cleveland's winning the AL Central last year.

CHUCK SOLOMON (DEPODESTA, EPSTEIN); AL MESSERSCHMIDT/WIREIMAGE.COM (RICCIARDI); LARRY GOREN/WIREIMAGE.COM

**STAND-UP GUY** Rather than put his assistants in a tough spot, McHale took on the task of reviving Minnesota's playoff hopes.

# Executive Decision

## Though he never wanted to coach, Timberwolves VP Kevin McHale put himself in charge of his moribund team. High risk, or nothing to lose?

BY JACK McCALLUM

*Photographs by* John W. McDonough

THE INTERIM COACH of the Minnesota Timberwolves switched on the lights of his Ritz-Carlton suite in Los Angeles and went immediately to the television, searching for the Clippers-Suns game being played that night in Phoenix. He ignored the fruit tray, the popcorn, the complimentary brews sloshing around in an ice bucket. "What would I be doing in the old days?" wondered Kevin McHale. "Well, looking for the Clippers wouldn't have been the first thing on my mind. And I probably would've had a beer *right away*." ¶ There's now a lot on the mind of McHale, who since Feb. 12 has been not only the vice president of operations for the Minnesota Timberwolves but also their coach. He spent much of last week working the phones in advance of the Thursday trade deadline. Ultimately, the T-Wolves stood pat, despite rumors that they were shopping guards Sam Cassell and Latrell Sprewell and center Michael Olowokandi. (Wearing his executive hat, McHale steadfastly refuses to comment.) Meanwhile, he had X-ing and O-ing to do. Last Thursday, with his cast unchanged, Minnesota fell to the Clippers 92–86. At week's end McHale had gone 3–3, leaving the T-Wolves, a Western Conference finalist last year, at 28–29, the ninth-best record in the West.

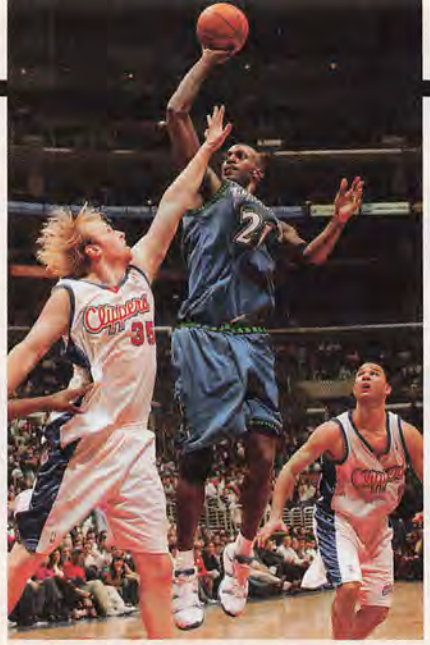
**HOLDING ON** Western finalists a year ago, the T-Wolves know they must pull together.

Many in the NBA were amazed when McHale, who has run basketball operations since 1995, grabbed the reins himself after he fired his close friend and former University of Minnesota teammate Flip Saunders. Unfailingly good-humored and glib, McHale is nevertheless famously impatient with what he perceives as the fundamental weaknesses of today's players. Whenever he was asked about coaching, McHale would always demur, saying, "I'd last about two minutes." He likes his hunting and his golf, pastimes more easily pursued as an exec.

And while he has the power to trade, waive or re-sign the players he's coaching, which gives him an advantage over his fellow interims—former assistants Frank Hamblen (Los Angeles Lakers) and Herb Williams (New York Knicks)—the move to the bench also carries great risk for the 47-year-old McHale. He was, after all, responsible for acquiring the very players whose underachieving helped get Saunders fired. He and Saunders were perceived around the Twin Cities as a matched set, the ex-Gophers running an NBA show. Now there's only one left, and he's asking the questions all new coaches ask: Should I shake things up drastically? How do I treat the assistants who were passed over? Are there gaps in my knowledge of the game?

And in McHale's case: What do I wear?

THE MAJOR reason McHale appointed himself instead of one of his assistants (Randy Wittman and Sidney Lowe have been NBA head coaches, and Jerry Sichting is widely respected as a teacher) was his awareness of how tough an interim coach's job can be. "If you give it to one of our guys and we still don't play well, then he gets frustrated and tainted in the long run," says McHale. "Had I not [taken the job], I would've always wondered if I was shirking responsibility. I get paid to take the heat."



**SPECIAL K** Minnesota's leading scorer and rebounder, Garnett describes McHale's arrival on the bench as "a breath of fresh air."

While everyone in the organization treads carefully around the subject of what ultimately went wrong under Saunders—who went 411–326 (.557) in nine-plus seasons—almost everyone agrees that discipline was lacking in the final months of his regime. Players were late for flights and buses. Minds wandered in timeout huddles and practice sessions. Like hundreds of NBA coaches before him, Saunders was tuned out, his pleas to play hard having become elevator music to the players.

Once McHale made the decision (with the blessing of owner Glen Taylor), he hit the ground running. Actually, running wasn't an option because of his arthritic ankles—when ankle transplant surgery is perfected, McHale plans to be first in line—but he did hit the ground talking. His first practice lasted three hours. (He lost his voice.) Reigning MVP Kevin Garnett shakes his head and smiles when he recalls McHale's early days on the job. "Kevin always did like to talk," says Garnett, "but then he went out and got himself a damn whistle. I mean, there was a *lot* of noise."

Initially McHale had decided on three basic changes: reduce the size of Saunders's playbook and try to exploit favorable matchups on offense; keep his interior defenders closer to the basket, cutting down on what he calls "full rotations"; and pay attention to players' punctuality. The last was part of a philosophy of getting tough on the court ("I'm a fan of smash-mouth basketball") and, especially, off it.

McHale likes coaching. "The **COMPETITIVE FIRE** does come back more than it did watching from the stands," he says.

As for X's and O's, McHale frequently attended practices and coaches' meetings but conceded that he knew only "about half the plays" when he made his debut on Feb. 13 (an 87–83 home loss to the Chicago Bulls). Always confident as a player, McHale was anxious before that tip-off. "The way I always looked at basketball was to study what the other team was doing and decide what you could do to counter that," says McHale. "But when I got on the bench, I thought, Whoa, maybe my ability to do that has been lost, never to be found again." He didn't pretend to know more than he did about the offense. During timeouts, McHale would say, "I want to run a high pick-and-roll with KG." An assistant would answer, "O.K., we call that *13 strong*." Sichting has since given McHale an index card containing all the play calls; he keeps it in his pocket and refers to it from time to time.

But McHale is still just as likely to say what he's looking for rather than what a play is called. He wants players to make more of their own decisions, improve on what he calls their "basketball IQ." The T-Wolves are still adjusting to the transition from a classic gym rat like Saunders to a classic read-and-react former Boston Celtic forward like McHale. Saunders *drew up* the game; McHale, a Hall of Famer, *sees* it. "Playing for Kevin is so different from anything else that I can't put it into words," says Cassell. "He'll just tell you to do something, like a player would on the playground." Garnett has talked constantly about how McHale has been "a breath of fresh air" and describes him as "a bar fighter who comes in, orders a drink, downs the drink, says whatever to whoever, then he's out of there." (The metaphors will sound more convincing if the fresh-aired bar fighter's team starts throwing a few combinations of its own.)

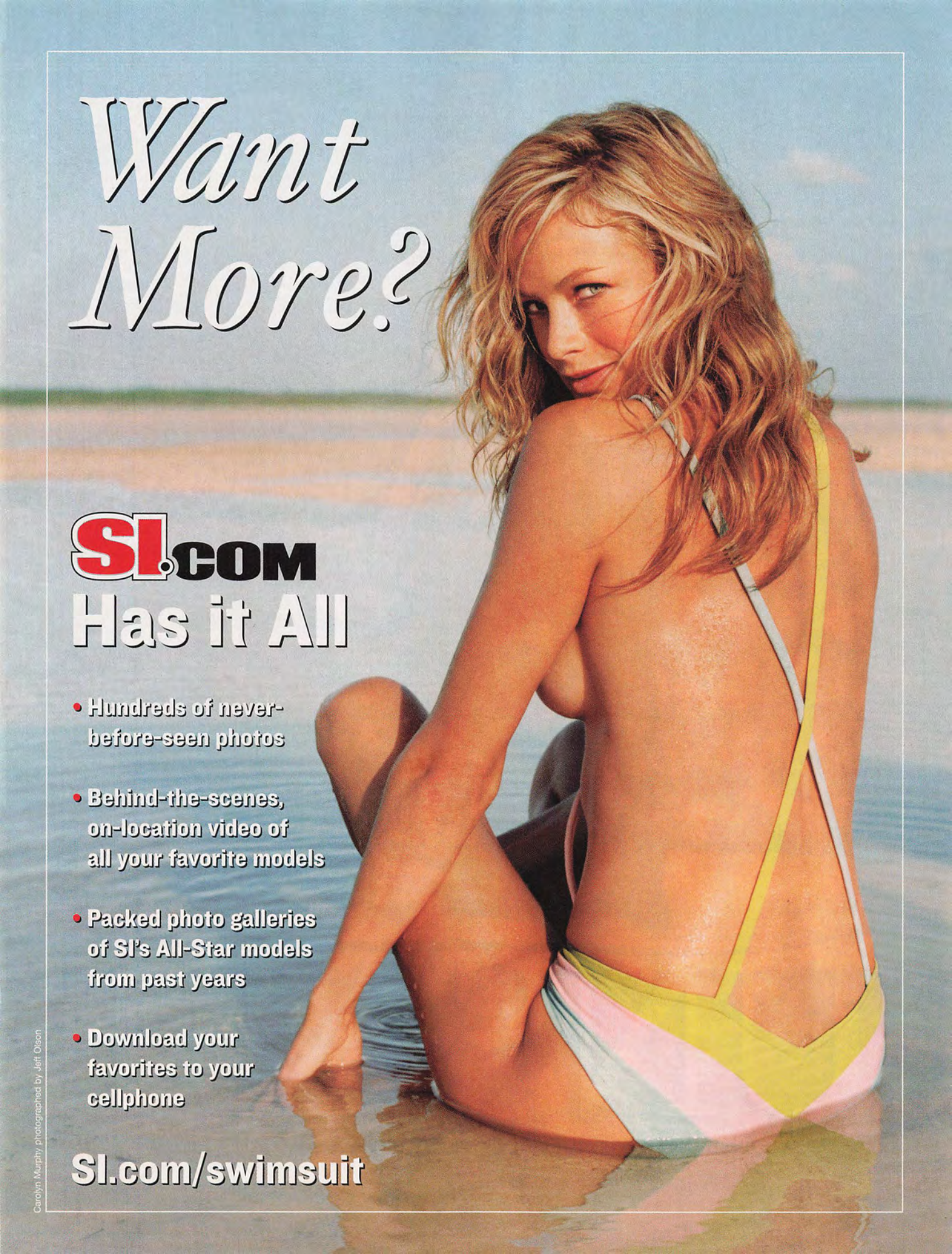
There's a practical reason the T-Wolves must make more of their own reads too: They can't *hear* McHale the way they heard Saunders, who prowled the sideline shouting play calls. McHale gets up from time to time, but—partly due to his temperament, partly to his ankles—he's basically a sitter. That doesn't mean he's not involved. "[The other team will] make a substitution, and Kevin will say, 'O.K, what plays can we run for Wally [Szczerbiak]?' " says Sichting. "Kevin talks a *lot* during the game. Of course, he talks a lot all the time."

For many, the best thing about the McHale regime is to see him down on the court before games—sport coat off, loafers on—instructing his team in the fine points. The sessions with his players have a kind of apple-polishing feel to them because McHale controls both their minutes and their long-term status with the franchise. Before Minnesota played the Clippers, he spent 10 minutes instructing Ndudi Ebi, a little-used forward who's on the injured list, about how to double-down and dig for the ball, then spring to the outside ("close out") to guard a shooter. Then he fed forward Mark Madsen and Ebi the ball as they went at each other hard in a one-on-one session.

By all accounts, including his own, McHale likes coaching more than he thought he would. "The competitive fire does come back as a coach more than it did watching from the stands," he says. "You're in the middle of it a little bit more. Your mind's active all the time." The players sense that he's into it. "It's energized him," says swingman Fred Hoiberg. Reluctantly, McHale even concedes, "I do have some new suits arriving soon," which is fortunate, since in the pocket of the old-school gray number he picked for his debut was a ticket stub for a Timberwolves-Warriors game in Oakland . . . from 1999. "It must be a while since I had that one cleaned," McHale told Steve Aschburner of the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*.

Given his enthusiasm, is it possible that if Minnesota finishes strong and grabs a playoff spot (at week's end they were 2½ games behind Hamblen's Lakers for the final one), McHale will take the *interim* tag off himself? "The chances of me doing this long term are slim to none," says McHale, who refuses to rule it out categorically. "I just don't think I'm cut out to be a career coach. The one thing I can guarantee right now is that I'll coach tomorrow night." Most interims would kill for that kind of security. □

ANN HEISENFELT/AP (MCHALE)

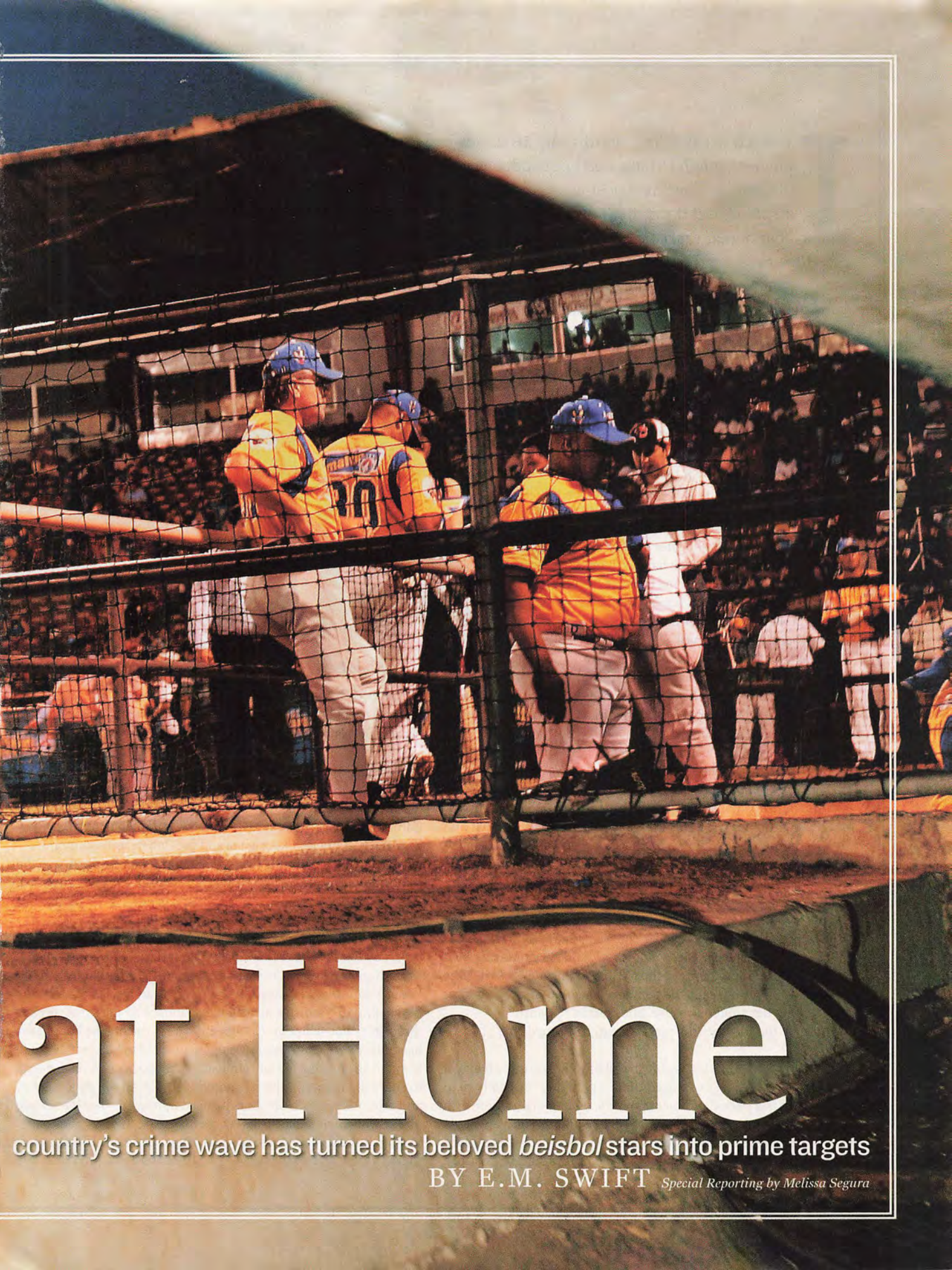

Want More?
SI.COM Has it All
• Hundreds of never-before-seen photos
• Behind-the-scenes, on-location video of all your favorite models
• Packed photo galleries of SI's All-Star models from past years
• Download your favorites to your cellphone
SI.com/swimsuit
Carolyn Murphy photographed by Jeff Olson

**Soldiering On**
The Venezuelan all-star game in Barquisimeto in December was held under tight security, with armed guards at the dugouts.

*Photographs by* Victor Baldizon

# UNSAFE

Even as **Venezuela** enjoys huge success as a hotbed of major league talent, the



# at Home

## country's crime wave has turned its beloved *beisbol* stars into prime targets

BY E.M. SWIFT *Special Reporting by Melissa Segura*

IT HAD BEEN five months and 18 days since Maura Villareal, the mother of Detroit Tigers relief pitcher Ugueth Urbina, had been abducted from her home in Ocumare del Tuy, a small town southeast of Caracas. Four men posing as policemen had forced her into a car, then bundled her onto a private airplane and flown her some 340 miles south of the Venezuelan capital. Deep in the jungle, at an abandoned tourist camp on the Guaniamo River in the mountainous state of Bolívar, she waited to be either ransomed or rescued. Las Nieves, the compound was called. The Snows. ¶ As many as a dozen armed men stood guard at the camp, which they'd surrounded with explosive devices. The gang comprised both Venezuelans and Colombians, drug traffickers moonlighting as kidnappers. More than 1,300 pounds of cocaine were stored at Las Nieves. The nearest town was eight hours away by car, so the 54-year-old Villareal had nowhere to run. She slept on a mattress in a tent and did little but bide her time and pray. She wrote letters to her sons, Ugueth, Ulises and Ulmer, and cooperated with her captors in making a videotape to prove to her family that she was still alive. Six million dollars, the kidnappers demanded for her release.

Villareal lost 50 pounds during her ordeal, and her hair, dyed brown at the time of the kidnapping on Sept. 1, grew out white. "You can't say they treated me either well or poorly," she later said of her abductors. "The most hurtful thing was having to hear them saying my rich son didn't love me because he didn't pay."

On the advice of police officials, Urbina had refused to discuss publicly what, if anything, he was doing to get his mother back. A wrong word, a mixed signal might cost Villareal her life. He, too, had to be patient and pray. Six times he spoke to the kidnappers on his cellphone. He stopped shaving and let his hair grow. "She's strong. She's a bull" was all he would say about his mother in a rare interview in early December. "The attitude I have to have to get through this, I get from her. My strength comes from her."

Then, on Feb. 18, acting on a tip from an anonymous source, 30 officers from Venezuela's antikidnapping unit made their move. In a dramatic, impeccably planned operation that lasted eight hours, government forces traveling first by helicopter, then by boat and finally on foot moved in on Las Nieves through the dense, snake-infested undergrowth and caught the abductors by surprise. In the gun battle that ensued one of the kidnappers was killed, two were captured and at least seven escaped into the jungle, some wounded. But Villareal was rescued unharmed. Having been abducted by men in police uniforms, however, she was wary of her rescuers.

"She didn't believe it was actually us," said Efrén Marin, chief of the antikidnapping unit of the CICPC—Venezuela's FBI. "She couldn't tell if it was really the police or just another gang of criminals taking her someplace else. She couldn't be sure."

It seems that no one in Venezuela can be these days.

**Relieved Reliever** Urbina (above and right, in Florida for spring training) did not say anything about his cellphone conversations with his mother's kidnappers until after her rescue (above left).

FOR VENEZUELA and its baseball players, it is an age of glory, it is an age of tragedy, it is a period of unseemly riches, it is a period of abject poverty, it is an era golden with opportunity, it is an era black with crime and terror. Venezuela is a place where baseball players are worshipped, it is a place where players are preyed upon. It is a country that, irresistibly, calls its players home, and it is a country that drives them away.

A record 66 Venezuelans played in the major leagues in 2004. Six of them—the Phillies' Bobby Abreu, the Marlins' Miguel Cabrera, the Tigers' Carlos Guillén, the Indians' Víctor Martínez, the Angels' Francisco Rodríguez and the Cubs' Carlos Zambrano—were All-Stars. A seventh, Twins lefthander Johan Santana, was the unanimous choice for the American League Cy Young Award. Baseball in Venezuela, in other words, has never been better. But life has seldom been worse.

Crime and violence in this major league breeding ground are everyday hazards, and few citizens, rich or poor, are untouched. Ask Alfonso (Chico) Carrasquel, who at 77 is the oldest living Venezuelan to have played in the major leagues. An idol in this baseball-mad country, Carrasquel has inhabited the same modest three-story house in Caracas since 1947. It's the one he bought for his mother with the $1,000 signing bonus paid to him by the White Sox; the one he's turned into a museum that he opens free of charge to share the memorabilia he's assembled during 60-plus years in and around baseball. The bats he used in four All-Star games are on the wall. Signed baseballs by the dozen are in glass bookcases. Vintage infielder's gloves, All-Star rings, black-and-white photographs are all handsomely exhibited. Here is Chico with Joe

PAULO PEREZ ZAMBRANO/EL UNIVERSAL/AP (VILLAREAL)

DiMaggio. Here with Stan Musial. Here with his double-play partner, Nellie Fox. It is Carrasquel's way of giving back, of holding out a branch of hope to the impoverished youth of Caracas, and it is one of many reasons that the first Venezuelan All-Star, whose career in the majors lasted from 1950 to '59, is beloved.

In 56 years that Carrasquel had lived in that house, he had never been robbed. Then, one evening in January 2003, he was walking his sister, a pregnant cousin and his four-year-old granddaughter to their car when they were jumped by two armed men. Horrifyingly, the men held a gun to the little girl's head. They demanded the car keys, and the women handed them over. The men then forced

## Baseball in Venezuela has never been better. But life has never been worse. Crime and violence are EVERYDAY HAZARDS.

Carrasquel, a diabetic who undergoes dialysis three times a week and can barely walk without assistance, to drive them away. When they had gone a safe distance, the men struck Carrasquel and took his gold watch. They drove off, leaving him dazed, injured and miles from home.

"I'm afraid," Carrasquel says now. "I've been attacked. But there are problems all over, and I'm not above them."

Did the young robbers, who were never caught, know who he was? The great Carrasquel? One of the first two All-Stars from Latin America? "These boys didn't understand what they were doing with all the drugs they were on," Carrasquel says. "They'd kill their own mothers. They lack all respect."

The same might be said by Venezuela's other great baseball icon, Luis Aparicio. "Little Looie," the only Venezuelan in the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, succeeded Carrasquel as the White Sox' shortstop in 1956, becoming the second in a long line of Venezuelans who were brilliant at that position—a list that includes Dave Concepción, Ozzie Guillén, Omar Vizquel and, now, the Dodgers' César Iztúris. Aparicio, the '56 American League Rookie of the Year, spent 18 years in the majors, made 10 All-Star teams and won nine Gold Gloves. Like Carrasquel, he is revered in his homeland, but that hasn't shielded him from tragedy.

Three years ago Aparicio's 40-year-old daughter, Sharon Iris Aparicio Llorente, was shot during a carjacking in Maracaibo, the city where he grew up. She was paralyzed from the neck down and spent the next two years hospitalized before dying in the fall of 2004. "People are scared," Aparicio says, echoing Carrasquel. "It's dangerous now in our country."

At 70 Aparicio is still active in baseball. He manages the Tiburones (Sharks) of La Guaira, the port city on the other side of the mountains that encircle Caracas. One of his batboys is 11-year-old Gustavo Polidor Jr. The boy's father, a journeyman shortstop, played seven seasons in the majors, for the Angels, Brewers and Marlins, between 1985 and '93. He was only the 38th Venezuelan to have made the majors in the 46 years since Carrasquel's uncle Alejandro Carrasquel became the first Venezuelan big leaguer, in 1939. Being called up was still a rare and wonderful thing for a Venezuelan, an accomplishment that made him a household name in his country.

The Polidor house in Caracas has a room in the back where Gus Sr.'s baseball memorabilia is on display. When Gus Jr. was younger, he always invited visitors back to check it out. His mother, Eduvigis, cannot get the memory of that out of her head. "Here's my dad," Gus Jr. would say, showing the drawings and photos of his father in a major league uniform. "He would show them as if his father were coming back," Eduvigis recalls.

But Gus Polidor wasn't coming back. One day in April 1995, as he was preparing to take Eduvigis out to do errands, he left the garage door open so he could take out the trash. As Eduvigis, holding one-year-old Gus Jr. in her arms, began to get into the car, she saw two men rush at her husband from opposite directions. One man stayed with Polidor, holding a gun on him, while the other approached Eduvigis and the baby. He put a gun to her head. She still has nightmares about it. She can still feel the man's fingers holding her arm. She heard her husband and his assailant raise their voices, and then she heard two shots. Polidor fell, mortally wounded in the head. "He died protecting his family," she says. "He was killed like a dog."

It took more than nine years for the killers to be convicted. At one point they were captured but set free because of the huge backlog in the courts. Eventually they were caught robbing a bank, and Eduvigis, who'd earned a law degree in the belief that it would help her bring the killers to justice, pushed for them to be tried for her husband's murder. On Oct. 6, 2004, the two men were convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to 25 years in prison. "They tried to defend themselves by saying they didn't know [their victim] was Gustavo," Eduvigis says. "They said if they had known, they wouldn't have done it."

While that wasn't even close to a valid defense, it made a certain sense in Venezuela. Baseball is the one thing citizens have in common in this deeply divided country, a nation polarized socially, politically and economically. Everyone's a fan. Everyone has a team he roots for. "We talk in baseball jargon," says Alfredo Villasmil, a veteran baseball writer for the Caracas newspaper *Últimas Noticias*. "If you don't get invited to a party, the next time you see the host, you tell him, 'Man, you gave me four balls.' If a coworker asks you to do a chore you don't want to do, you say, 'That pitch is down and away.' Baseball means everything to us."

Aficionados of the game like to tell the story of the time Magglio Ordóñez was being carjacked, in November 2002, and one of his assailants realized he was the All-Star outfielder for the White Sox. The thieves apologized and let him go. But that incident represents the rare exception. More often Venezuela's major leaguers, with their fancy cars, fat wallets, gold jewelry and beautiful women, are magnets for trouble.

Twins pitcher Juan Rincón was recognized by the men who

were robbing him a few years ago, and after he told them he wasn't carrying any cash, he offered to write them a personal check. They accepted. At eight the next morning Rincón got a call from the bank asking for his approval to cash the check. He gave it, reasoning that the robbers knew who he was and where he lived.

Rangers outfielder Richard Hidalgo was shot in the arm during a carjacking outside Valencia in 2002, when he was playing for the Astros. Asdrúbal Infante, a prospect in the Tigers' farm system and the brother of Tigers infielder Omar Infante, was shot and killed during a robbery in Guanta in 1999. José Mora, the older brother of Orioles third baseman Melvin Mora, was murdered by a hired killer in April 2002 after he'd been in an altercation. "You can trust nobody," Melvin has said. "Not even a policeman." Mora,

**Baseball is the one thing citizens share in this DEEPLY DIVIDED country. Everyone's a fan. Everyone has a team he roots for.**

who batted .340 last year, the second-highest average in the American League, lives outside Baltimore. "I'd love to live in my country," he says, "but now I don't want to raise my kids there."

SO MUCH of what happens in Venezuela, good and bad, is connected to the country's vast petroleum reserves. It was U.S. oil workers who popularized baseball in Venezuela in the 1920s, after they came to drill for the low-grade crude that had been discovered in the Lake Maracaibo region. So while the rest of South America dances in the streets over soccer, in Venezuela *beisbol* is the national passion.

It's estimated that 78 billion barrels of oil are still recoverable in Venezuela—the most of any country in the Western Hemisphere. Venezuela is the world's fifth-largest oil exporter and the fourth-largest supplier to the U.S., which buys two thirds of its exports. "Every part of Venezuela's economy is tied to how oil is doing," says U.S. ambassador Bill Brownfield. "It's a one-issue economy."

Which means that every time the price of oil drops significantly, the country is plunged into economic crisis. Venezuela has insufficiently developed its other significant natural resources—aluminum, gold, iron, coal, timber, diamonds and fishing. And because of the high crime rate and political volatility, tourism is a fraction of what it might be. The result, according to the U.S. State Department, is a national unemployment rate of about 20% and an underemployment rate of 30% to 40%. Between 1975 and 1995 the poverty rate in Venezuela soared from 35% to 70%, according to the Poverty Project of the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello in Caracas, and some estimates today put the rate as high as 80%. A country in such straits is a natural breeding ground for crime.

## No Exception

Even Carrasquel (far left) and Aparicio, their country's first big league stars (below, in 1956), have been victimized.

AP (1956)

Hugo Chávez, Venezuela's president, promised to reverse the downward economic spiral when he campaigned for election in 1998. A burly ex-paratrooper who often wears a red beret, Chávez led a military coup attempt in 1992, for which he spent two years in prison. He was pardoned and began trading on his notoriety by campaigning on a populist platform, vowing to stop government corruption and to create jobs for the poor.

Despite high oil prices, Chávez has not delivered on his promises. His rule has become increasingly authoritarian. He's cracked down on the press while speaking admiringly of Fidel Castro and Muammar Gaddafi. He's alienated the U.S. by buying arms from Russia and providing oil to Cuba. He's also goaded the Bush Administration verbally, characterizing the President as an "a------" and referring to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as "an illiter-

ate." Wealthy Venezuelans have been moving their money abroad so fast that, according to a local joke, Venezuela's largest export after oil is cash. "Baseball is the *only* unifying factor in this country right now," says Ambassador Brownfield. "It's literally the only subject I can bring up that doesn't get me into trouble."

To Venezuelans, however, baseball and politics definitely mix. Chávez likes to pose throwing a baseball and, like Castro, brags about his prowess as a pitcher. During a 2002 anti-Chávez protest in Valencia, Phil Regan, who was managing that city's baseball club, the Navegantes de Magallanes (Magellan's Navigators), saw the marchers approach the hotel where his team was staying and chant, *Ni un paso atrás* (Not one step backward). "The crowd stopped in front of the hotel, sang the national anthem and began passing their caps to the players for autographs," recalls Regan, a former Orioles skipper who has been managing in Venezuela since 1992. "After a while they marched off. That's how much they love baseball."

Indeed, in the winter of 2003–04, as Chávez faced a recall election that he would ultimately survive, a popular chant at games that featured his namesake Endy Chávez, the Washington Nationals outfielder, was *¡Endy, sí! ¡Chávez, no!*

IF THERE is one man who knows best that no wealthy Venezuelan is safe from crime, it's Urbina, the Tigers reliever with 227 big league saves. His family was first victimized in 1994, when Ugueth's father, Juan, was killed while resisting carjackers. Then, last year, Ugueth was jolted again when he learned that his mother had been kidnapped. She was the first relative of a Venezuelan major league player to be abducted.

"This can happen to anybody, if you have money," Urbina notes. After his mother's release he said she would recover in Venezuela for a few weeks and then travel to Europe before spending some time with him at a house he owns in Miami. He assumes that ultimately she will return to Venezuela. "She loves her country," the pitcher told reporters at the Tigers' spring training facility in Florida. "She'll always want to go back. That's the way she is."

Kidnapping has only recently become common in Venezuela. "There used to be maybe one in three years," says Marin, the police antiabduction chief, who told SI in December that he had put 40 agents on the Urbina case. "Then we started getting a lot of copycat kidnappings, like what's going on in Colombia."

Colombia, which borders Venezuela to the west, has an estimated 2,700 kidnappings a year. In 2001, by contrast, there were just 60 abductions in Venezuela. By 2003 that number had risen to more than 300, though Marin claims that in 2004 the number fell to 115. Of those, he says, 95 were safely resolved without paying a ransom. "Baseball players are not the targets of these situations any more than anyone else with a lot of money," Marin says, "but to be safe, they have to start improving the security around them, even if they live in a small town."

Certainly Venezuela's eight winter league ball clubs have gotten the message. The Caracas Lions, whose 2004–05 roster included nine major leaguers, employ a security company that sends four armed guards to every game. They are in the dugout before and during play. They travel on the team bus to and from the hotel. And they give players the dos and don'ts of living in Caracas.

"We tell them to let us know where they're going and who they're going to be with if they leave the hotel," says José Elías Escalona

# On Deck, Another Star

## The Indians' Franklin Gutiérrez just might be Venezuela's hottest prospect

WHILE THERE may not be a perfect recipe for success in baseball, Franklin Gutiérrez thinks his mother's *sopita de sardina* (sardine soup) comes close. As Leida Williams de Gutiérrez adds a touch of garlic, a dash of salt and a sprinkle of onions to the broth, Franklin kisses her and says, "Your soup is the secret to my power." Then he heads out the door of their apartment to play a winter league game for his hometown Caracas Lions.

With Leida's soup in his stomach, lightning speed in his wrists and crossbow power in his throwing arm, the 22-year-old Gutiérrez, an outfielder acquired by the Cleveland Indians from the Los Angeles Dodgers in last April's Milton Bradley trade, is the prime candidate to become the next big thing out of Venezuelan baseball. But he's only one in a long line of his countrymen knocking at the door of the majors.

Talento Grande Gutiérrez was third in the Venezuelan league in home runs this winter and was voted an all-star.

In the American League alone, half the teams have a Venezuelan among their top 10 prospects, as ranked by *Baseball America*. (And the New York Yankees traded their No. 2 prospect, catcher Dioner Navarro, to the Arizona Diamondbacks in the Randy Johnson deal before Navarro was shipped on to L.A.) The names Guillermo Quiroz, Félix Hernández, Yusmeiro Petit and Javier Herrera will soon pop up in box scores around the bigs. Quiroz, the No. 3–rated prospect in Toronto's system last year, finished the season catching for the Blue Jays. Hernández, the Seattle Mariners' top pitching prospect, has the heat and pitch variety to soon replace fellow Venezuelan righthander Freddy García, who was traded to the Chicago White Sox in June. Petit, another righty, is tagged as the best control pitcher in the New York Mets' farm system. And Herrera, the No. 2 prospect for Oakland, will bring speed to the A's outfield and power to the plate.

The immediate future, though, belongs to Gutiérrez. "There's nothing but great things ahead for him," says John Farrell, director of player development for the Indians. Just three years after the Dodgers signed the wiry 6′ 2″, 175-pound Gutiérrez, he earned their 2003 Minor League Player of the Year Award; a year later, with the Indians' Double A Akron Aeros, he batted .302 in 262 at bats before a pitch hit his left elbow and sidelined him for two months.

"I need to work on hitting breaking balls," Gutiérrez says, pinpointing a weakness that led him to strike out 77 times and walk only 23 times last season in Akron. For help, though, he looks only as far as that kitchen where his mom serves her soup. There, after every game for the Lions, Franklin and his father, Franklin Sr., a government worker who grew up playing street baseball, sit and analyze his game. "We talk about bat speed, about fielding," the son says. "He's always with me, congratulating me, helping me. It's beautiful." —M.S.

Martini, who heads the security company. "We do background checks on any ladies they bring back to the hotel. We tell players not to follow the same routine every day: Don't drive the same car. Don't take the same route to the park. Don't work out at the gym at the same time. We tell them to take off their jewelry when they go out. We tell them not to get right behind another car when they drive, to leave space to go around it if it suddenly stops. And if they do get robbed, we tell them to give up everything. There are 90 to 100 murders in Venezuela every weekend, and 30 to 35 are in Caracas."

The players listen. "Of course you worry," says Abreu, the Phillies' $10 million-a-year outfielder, who still plays 15 to 20 games each winter for the Lions. "You have bodyguards. My family has people take care of them too. You don't go out too much. But it's our country, and you want to go home after being away eight or nine months."

Cubs catcher Henry Blanco, who also plays for the Lions in the big league off-season, agrees. "You don't go out to eat with your family after a game, even to a good restaurant," he says. "So we just go back to the hotel. We're learning how to live like this."

And still the millionaire ballplayers return to play in the Venezuelan league. They love that the fans are rabid, the rivalries fierce and the loyalties deep. "We don't come back for the money," says Blanco. "The fans here give us so much."

**Heavy Hitters** During a state visit in 2000, Castro managed Cuba's team to victory over Chávez's Venezuelans.

ANDREW WINNING/REUTERS

On Venezuelan clubs big leaguers play next to Class A prospects, some in their teens. The teams play to win, and anything less than maximum effort is met with vociferous catcalling and whistling from the demanding fans. The atmosphere in the stadiums is festive and raucous. Beer is sold out of tubs of ice, which is sometimes hurled at umpires or players who fall into disfavor. Bottles of liquor can be purchased and consumed on the premises. Vendors walk the aisles selling whistles and blow horns. Between innings cheerleaders in disco-style outfits dance in cages, illuminated by colored spotlights and shrouded in mist from smoke machines. Fans all over the park dance with them.

"It's a lot more expressive down here," says Tom Evans, a journeyman minor leaguer who's been playing winter ball in Venezuela since 1998. "The fans are wild. They chant. If you're in a slump, they let you know. On a 2-and-0 count, they get loud and excited because it's a hitter's count and they know something might happen."

"Venezuelan fans don't get to see their favorite players in the big leagues, so this is their chance," says Abreu. "You go to a game between Magallanes and Caracas, and 25,000 to 30,000 people are screaming on every out. It's like Boston-Yankees every time."

"It's so much fun playing in front of your family and friends," says Yankees third base coach Luis Sojo, a Caracas native whose hero growing up was Reds shortstop Concepción. Sojo enjoyed a 13-year big league career. For the last 19 years he's also played winter ball in his home country, though mindful of the dangers.

"This is a big country, and there are a lot of bad people around," Sojo says. "Still, I don't have a bodyguard. I don't carry a gun. I drive my own car. You don't walk the streets at two in the morning. You stay in the hotel and order room service. You've got to take care of yourself. That's what I tell my family."

IRONICALLY, THE grim economic conditions of the past 20 years have been partly responsible for launching Venezuelan baseball's golden age. With little wealth trickling down to the lower classes, a large segment of the population has come to see the sport they love as a way out of poverty.

"From the 1950s to the early 1980s the country was blooming," says Andrés Reiner, 69, the godfather of the surge in Venezuelan major leaguers. Reiner, now a special assistant to the Astros, persuaded the team's general manager, Bill Woods, to open Venezuela's first baseball academy in 1989. "Everybody [here] was happy then, everybody was making money," Reiner recalls. "Youngsters were told to go to university. When I went to talk to parents to try to persuade them to let their sons go to the baseball academy, they'd laugh. It was tough. Now it's pretty easy. It's the parents who want me to look at their sons."

Reiner, who moved with his family to Venezuela from Hungary when he was 10 years old, believed that Venezuela's reputation for producing only one great player every 10 years was nonsense. "I was sure it was just the way the country was scouted and the way the players were developed," Reiner says. "We had to change completely the way things were done."

Some of the more notable graduates of Reiner's academy, which is located in Valencia, make up a major league honor roll: Abreu, Carlos Guillén, Freddy García, Mora, Hidalgo and Santana. Venezuela, it turned out, was a mother lode of talent. The Astros' academy recruited players as young as 14 from all over the country and taught them everything from how to hit a cutoff man to how to speak English. "I was 15 when I went to the academy," says Abreu. "I lived there. I took English classes. They taught me the way they play baseball in the U.S. We practiced from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., and they paid for your hotel and food and gave you a small salary."

The graduates of the academy had an easier time than many other Latin American players adjusting to huge cultural differences when they arrived in the U.S. "Major League Baseball could do a much better job of supporting Latin players when they get to the big leagues," says Regan, who this winter managed the Cardinals of Lara. "They basically say, 'Here's your salary. Be at the ballpark at four o'clock.' The baseball academies really help. The players they turn out are quality people. Most speak Eng-

lish. They're hardworking. They understand baseball, and they play the game right. They play more of a control-type game. They aren't explosive. You don't see a lot of 39-homer years, but they can hit and manufacture runs. They're sure-handed, and they don't throw the ball away."

Houston's success inspired other major league teams, and today there are nine baseball academies in Venezuela financed by U.S. franchises. It's proved a wise investment: 96 Venezuelans have broken into the big leagues since 1995, second in number only to players from the Dominican Republic. Reiner believes the gap is

**Home Team** Bosom buddies García (left) and Urbina (right, with Abreu) have connected their houses in Caracas.

closing fast. "The Dominican Republic is small and easy to scout," he says. "It has just nine million people. Venezuela has 25 million people and is bigger than Texas. I think it's still an untapped area. There are places that don't even get looked at. The numbers are going to increase, there's no doubt in my mind."

Aparicio believes there was always plenty of baseball talent in Venezuela. "The difference now is, the scouts are here," he says. "We played only two or three times a week. Now [Venezuelan prospects] play almost every day. They eat better than we did, and they take vitamins. Their fitness is better. They're stronger."

Significantly, Venezuelan parents also push their kids to play baseball now. "My mother hated that I was a ballplayer," Aparicio says. "The hardest day of my life was when I told my father I was going to quit school and play baseball. And he owned the Maracaibo team! Now you see fathers at little league games yelling at their seven- and eight-year-olds to play harder."

"We just played for fun," agrees García, 29, the White Sox righthander with an 85–54 career record. "Our parents pushed us to go to school. Now Venezuelans see they can make good money playing baseball. I've got friends who graduated from college, and they can't get jack. They're driving taxis."

GARCÍA GREW UP in a poor hillside district of Caracas, in a ramshackle house that overlooked a highway. His father drove a taxi. His mother was a nurse. They were always working, too busy to take him to ball games. So he sneaked in.

Today he lives in one of the best sections of the city, where he's a neighbor of Urbina's. They're best friends. García's house is at street level, protected by a 12-foot-high stone wall topped by an electric fence. There are bars over his windows. A neighbor's attack dog barks savagely when anyone approaches.

Urbina's house, built two years ago, is perched high above the street, with a commanding view of the surrounding hills. A ladder connects his pool deck with García's patio, and they use it to go back and forth between the houses, as if they were living in a very, very fancy boys' treehouse. Urbina was best man at García's wedding in December, the bride a cousin of Ozzie Guillén's. The two players like to hang out together during the day and watch Mexican soap operas. "I like to stay home," García says. "When you go out, you have to go out with a bunch of people. Ten years ago you could do whatever you wanted. Now, if you have money, you're a target." A third house is situated to the side of Urbina's property and above García's, and they are planning to buy it and one day connect the three houses to create one huge compound.

"There are two kinds of people here: rich and poor," says Urbina. "No middle class. Thirty years ago Venezuela had a middle class. I don't want my kid to try to be a baseball player. I don't like this trend. I want him to go to school. Then he will have a choice. The problem is, it's really hard to find a regular job now in Venezuela."

Despite the crime, millionaire ballplayers still return to play in the Venezuelan league. "The fans GIVE US SO MUCH," Blanco says.

Urbina said in December that he was looking forward to counseling young Venezuelan players at spring training. "We all come from the same background," he said. He remembers what it was like to be a carefree boy playing baseball in the street, hitting a taped cabbage with a piece of wood. "We come from the bottom and make our way to the top. I tell young guys, 'Work hard every day, respect the game. Play defense. Listen to the managers and coaches. You represent everyone who went before you.' "

Spring training. It is a time of hope. It is a time to scream at the heavens in despair. □

## COLLEGE BASKETBALL

For the first time under Rick Pitino, Louisville is on a roll going into March • LeBron James's high school buddies spark Akron

## THE NBA

Rookie Dwight Howard has look of a longtime star • Snag in Ray Allen contract talks • Danny Ainge grows up as a G.M.

**FRYE COOKING** Arizona senior center Channing Frye (45) made 13 of 15 shots while scoring 30 points against Washington last Saturday, but the Wildcats' shaky perimeter play and poor free throw shooting down the stretch kept them from clinching the Pac-10 title, as the Huskies won 93–85 in Seattle.

*Photograph by* John W. McDonough

# Inside

## The Week In Sports

950 AM
55
CATS
SIMMONS
1

**ON A ROLL**
Pitino (inset) has Myles (2) & Co. pointed toward their best run since '97.



# Cardinal Rule

## After emphatically snapping its streak of February swoons, Louisville looks like a team to beat in March Madness

IT WASN'T pretty, but Louisville's 53–44 come-from-behind win at Memphis last Saturday night was significant. The victory kept the No. 9 Cardinals in a tie with Charlotte for first place in Conference USA; it made amends for an 85–68 loss to the Tigers at Freedom Hall on Feb. 9, their only double-digit loss this year; and it proved that February doesn't have to be the cruelest month for the team.

Before it went 6–1 this February, Louisville (24–4 overall, 12–2 in Conference USA) had never had a winning record in the month under coach Rick Pitino, who is in his fourth year at the school. Indeed, at this time last year the Cardinals were in the midst of an epic swoon: After rocketing to a 16–1 start, they lost nine of their last 13 games, including their NCAA first-rounder against Xavier. Two reasons for the free fall were point guard Taquan Dean's midseason sports hernia, which severely limited his outside shooting and his effectiveness on defense, and the team's weak inside game.

The latter problem was remedied by the return of senior forward Ellis Myles, who sat out last season after rupturing the patellar tendon in his right knee. Despite breaking his left thumb on Jan. 19, the 6' 7", 245-pound Myles, a dependable rebounder and post defender, averaged 11.9 points and 9.6 rebounds in February. Against Memphis he was the catalyst in Louisville's overcoming an 11-point second-half deficit, grabbing nine of his 11 rebounds in the final 8:21. "Ellis Myles came in and brought us a physical game tonight, which we needed because they were dominating us on the glass," Dean said afterward.

Dean, a 6' 3" junior who is a converted shooting guard, did fine himself, scoring a team-high 14 points and pulling down eight rebounds despite another ailment, this time mononucleosis. The illness is keeping him out of the practice gym, where he has been known to spend the night in a sleeping bag "with the pizza guy on call" after late shooting sessions. "I'm playing on pure fumes," he says. "It's very tough because my timing is off. I haven't practiced in about 2½ weeks, so it's hard to get everything back. But my teammates keep me going."

Aside from being a gutty team, the Cardinals have proved to be exceptionally good on the road. They've lost only twice away from Freedom Hall—to Iowa in Maui and at Houston, by a total of eight points—and they've won three of their biggest road games, at Cincinnati, Marquette and Memphis, after trailing by double digits. Given that their 2–3 matchup zone held Memphis to 19.6% shooting (the Tigers were 1 for 23 from beyond the arc), there is no doubt that they can be a great defensive team too. "We are starting to feed off our defense," says junior forward Francisco Garcia, the team's leading scorer (15.9 points per game).

It all bodes well for Louisville's first extended run in the NCAAs since the Cardinals reached the Elite Eight in 1997. "What's dif-

## Pro Prospects

An NBA scout evaluates the potential of New Mexico forward **Danny Granger**, a 6' 8", 225-pound senior who at week's end was averaging 18.2 points, 8.7 rebounds, 2.2 steals and 2.1 blocks and shooting 47.5% from three-point range.

*"Let's put it this way: He's a talent because he's 6' 8" and he has some skills. He's more than just a post player—he handles the ball, he can pass, he'll grab defensive rebounds and lead the fast break. . . . I don't like the way he shoots the ball, but his statistics show that he's capable from three-point range. . . . He's long and bouncy. . . . He's piqued my interest in the best way. At this point I'm curious to see how he does in the draft workouts against high school and European players. I can't say anything conclusive about him as far as the NBA [some projections have him as a borderline first-round pick], but he is definitely on my radar screen."*

BOB ROSATO (MYLES); AL TIELEMANS (PITINO); DAVID BENYAK (GRANGER)

ferent this year is that everybody wants to win; it's not just a few guys with heart," says Dean. "Last year's disappointment kind of prepared us for this year. Everybody has heart, everybody is ready to step up, everybody is going to the gym late at night. I can't wait to get back there myself."

ZIPS' WINNING WAYS

## LeBron's Pals Spark Akron

Most players who move from high school to Division I ball have to give up stardom and learn to be part of a supporting cast. Not Akron sophomores Dru Joyce and Romeo Travis. As teammates of Cleveland Cavaliers star LeBron James at St. Vincent–St. Mary High in Akron, Joyce and Travis knew nothing but complementary roles. "When you play with LeBron, he does so much that you don't have to do as much for your team to be successful," says

**JAMES GANG** LeBron's former running mate Travis has been an inside force for the Zips.

Travis, a 6' 7", 220-pound forward, "so some people wonder if you can really play."

No one should wonder any longer. Thanks in large part to Joyce, a 6-foot point guard who dishes out 4.6 assists a game, and Travis, who stepped into the starting lineup for injured Jeremiah Wood in early January and is the team's second-leading scorer (11.5) and rebounder (7.5 per game), the Zips (17–8 overall, 10–6 in the MAC) are enjoying their first winning season in five years. Picked to finish fifth in the MAC East, they are in a four-way tie for second place and have a good chance of making the postseason for the first time since 1989, when Bob Huggins led them to the NIT. (Akron's last trip to the NCAAs was in 1986.)

James has attended three Zips games this season, and Joyce and Travis talk to him on the phone several times a week. They also visit his house whenever he is back in town. "We're definitely close," says Travis. "We follow him, and he follows us."

Learning to play with guys who are mere mortals wasn't easy for Joyce and Travis. "I had a lot of lazy habits when I first got here," says Joyce, who boasts a solid 2-to-1 assist-to-turnover ratio. "When LeBron was on your team, you could just throw the ball up there, and you knew he was going to get it because nobody could outjump him. I can't do that in college."

Not everything about the college game has been a big adjustment. Joyce and Travis still play their home games at Rhodes Arena, where St. Vincent–St. Mary played during the duo's final two years in high school. And they are very familiar with Akron coach Keith Dambrot, whom they and James got to know in middle school when they attended the dollar clinics he ran at the local Jewish community center. Dambrot later coached St. V-M to the first two of the three state championships the school won with James and Joyce (Travis transferred in as a sophomore, a year after the first of those titles), before becoming an assistant at Akron in June 2001.

"Those guys lost, what, five games in high school?" says Dambrot. "They are used to winning; they expect it. A lot of that attitude has rubbed off on our other guys, and that's a key to why we are winning now." □

JEFF HARWELL/ZIPS SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY (TRAVIS); GEORGE WIDMAN/AP (MARTELLI); MANNY MILLAN (GREER)

## Seth Davis's Hoop Thoughts

### RISING ABOVE

The response of Saint Joseph's coach **Phil Martelli** to Temple coach **John Chaney**'s reprehensible actions on Feb. 22 further demonstrated why Martelli *(left)* is one of the classiest acts in the sport. Though Martelli was obviously distraught over losing senior forward **John Bryant** for the year at a time when the Hawks were fighting for an NCAA tournament bid, he did not publicly come out and ask the Atlantic 10 to extend Chaney's suspension beyond the regular season. Usually one of the most accessible coaches in the country, Martelli also declined to take calls from reporters so he would not add to the controversy. After St. Joe's had its four-game winning streak snapped by Rhode Island 65–60 last Saturday, Martelli refused to use Bryant's injury as an excuse for the loss. College basketball should be grateful to Martelli for taking the high road during one of the season's lowest moments.

### UNDER THE RADAR

**Quemont Greer,** *6' 7" senior forward, DePaul*

Greer has long been one of the stronger players in Conference USA, but this season he has added polish to his offense. After making just seven of his 51 three-point attempts last season, he was shooting 37.0% from behind the arc at week's end, which had helped him raise his scoring average from 12.6 points to 18.8, second-best in the league. His 7.4-rebound average was 10th in Conference USA. Picked in the preseason to finish sixth in the league, the surprising Blue Demons (18–7 overall, 10–4 in C-USA) are in the hunt for an at-large berth to the NCAA tournament.

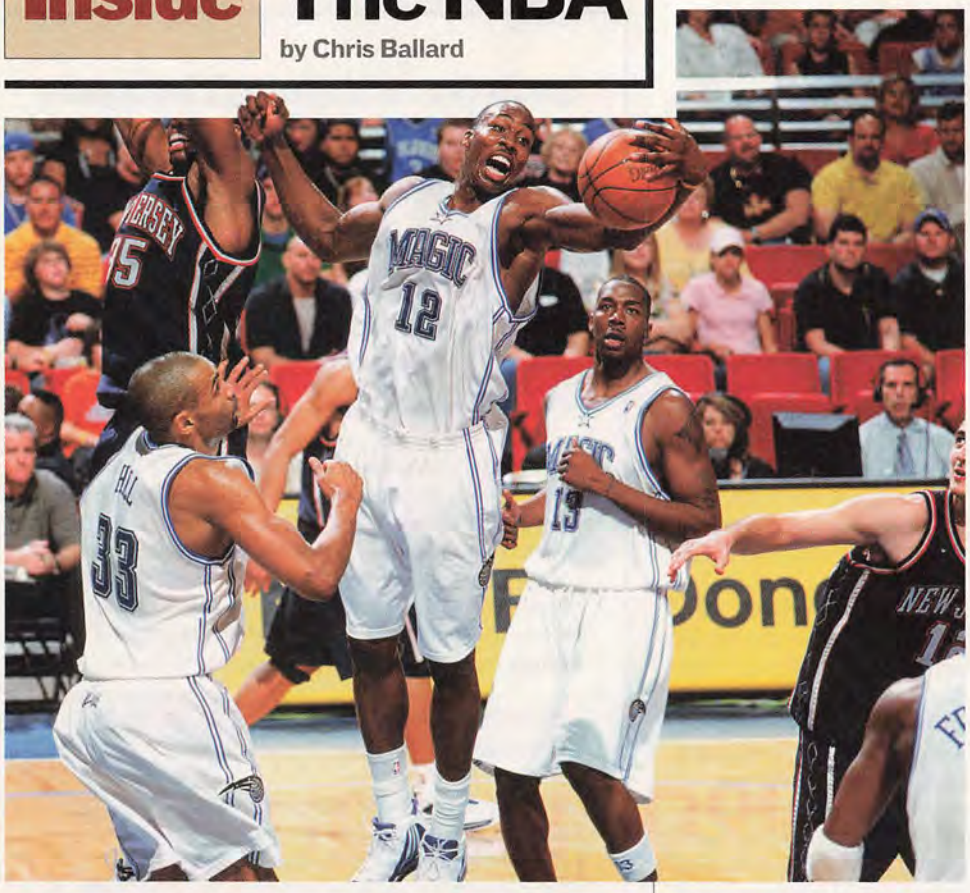
### THREE-POINTER

1 Don't be fooled by **Vermont**'s lofty RPI ranking. The Catamounts are 23rd this week, but if they falter in the America East tournament, they will be far from a lock to get into the NCAA field. The conference, which has never received an at-large bid, is ranked 15th by the RPI, and Vermont's best win was a Dec. 30 victory at Holy Cross.

2 **Syracuse** better beware of its free-throw-shooting problem. The Orange is 11th in the Big East from the charity stripe at 66.4%, and that includes Gerry McNamara's impressive 85.7% clip. That lack of touch may cost the team at the end of a close game.

3 Marquette senior **Travis Diener**'s career ended too soon. Thanks to the broken left hand he suffered in practice on Feb. 22, the 6' 1" marksman, who was leading Conference USA in scoring (19.7 points per game) and assists (7.0), will not get the send-off he deserved after finishing 83 points shy of the school scoring record and helping the Golden Eagles reach the NCAA tournament twice, including the Final Four two years ago.

*Stewart Mandel projects the field of 65 in his Bracket Watch at* **SI.com**.




**BOARDING SCHOOL** The 19-year-old Howard has been a quick study in NBA rebounding.

# Dwight Stuff

## Though he's not the front-runner for Rookie of the Year, Dwight Howard will one day be the class of his class

BEFORE A recent game in Boston, Magic forward Dwight Howard stopped near the stands to sign autographs. As he methodically grabbed and scrawled, one young Celtics fan appraised the 6' 11", 260-pound teenager, as if looking at a new car, and said, "Rookie of the Year, huh, Dwight?"

Howard looked up. "Yeah," he said, smiling. "It would be nice."

Nice, but not likely. Even though Howard has more than lived up to the expectations that made him the No. 1 pick, Bobcats forward Emeka Okafor, the second choice out of UConn, has played like the second coming of Charles Barkley, averaging 14.8 points and 10.9 rebounds through Sunday. If the season ended now, Okafor would be a lock to win the rookie award, even though the more promising future may belong to Howard (with Bulls guard Ben Gordon making a strong move on the outside).

Only 19, Howard was averaging 10.5 points, 9.6 rebounds (3.5 offensive, fourth most in the league) and 1.64 blocks at week's end while shooting 49.2%—numbers that compare favorably with those of Kevin Garnett and Amare Stoudemire in their first seasons out of high school. On Dec. 20 Howard became the youngest player to pull down 20 rebounds, a feat he pulled off again two months later. "He's so quick to the ball and so strong that you have to be aware of him at all times," says Celtics forward Raef LaFrentz. "He's going to be a good one. He's well ahead of the curve."

The Magic has needed him to be. From the season's outset Howard has been an integral part of the game plan, especially on defense; he's asked to play the league's top power forwards straight up. "Every night he has that matchup, and he handles it alone," says coach Johnny Davis. "He just needs to remember what kind of scoring option his man is and gain the experience [to know] when to leave him. He's unique in that he can disrupt a game defensively, which he's done on a couple of occasions."

Asked which of his blocks was the best so far, Howard says, "I don't think anybody's ever blocked Rasheed Wallace's jump shot, so for me that was fun. And I got him twice." He pauses and grins his choirboy grin. "I also got Jermaine O'Neal's, and he shoots it from behind his head too."

On offense Howard possesses two rare qualities for a big man: court vision and soft hands. But his shooting range doesn't extend much beyond his dunking range, and when posting up, he doesn't create contact to get leverage to move a defender. By his estimation Orlando runs a grand total of one play per game for him, though in time that should increase significantly. "In high school Dwight could just turn around and shoot over guys," says Davis. "Now he's gone from the kiddie pool to the adult pool."

The Magic is overseeing every aspect of that transition. A personal chef prepares Howard's meals (the goal: 5,000 calories a day); strength and con-

## Scout's Take

On 21-year-old **Nikoloz Tskitishvili**, the No. 5 pick in 2002, who went from the Nuggets to the Warriors in a four-player trade last Thursday:

*"He's 7 feet and he's a decent shooter, but it doesn't look as if he's put a lot of work into his game because he hasn't shown much improvement. The rare times he's gotten minutes, he showed little in the way of instincts. Here's a guy who has all the skills and who must have done well on the tests that teams use to forecast a player's potential, but he doesn't have the understanding of the game necessary to put those skills to use. He could make a career for himself as a spot-up shooter—a three-point specialist like Matt Bullard—but it wouldn't surprise me if he went back to Europe after this season and we never saw him again."*

FERNANDO MEDINA/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (HOWARD); ROCKY WIDNER/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (TSKITISHVILI)

ditioning coach Mick Smith supervises his lifting (he's now benching 275 and is already the strongest player on the team); assistant coach Clifford Ray drills him daily on post moves (developing a baby hook is objective No. 1); and his locker is strategically located between those of Grant Hill (to impart veteran savvy) and DeShawn Stevenson (who made the jump from high school to the pros four years ago).

All the attention is mind-bending for Howard, who has gone from Bible study with his buddies at Southwest Atlanta Christian Academy in Georgia to road trips with millionaires 10 years his senior. His teammates like him—"easy-going and remarkably mature" is forward Pat Garrity's assessment. On the court Howard's biggest adjustment has been avoiding distractions. "I can watch film all day, and it looks so easy," he says, shaking his head, "but when I'm out there in front of 20,000 fans, it's a different feeling."

Howard admits that he'd love to win a certain award, but he adds that his first priority is helping the Magic (28–27 through Sunday) reach the playoffs. Besides, the laurels will come. He may not be *the* rookie of *this* year, but he's likely to be the one best remembered 10 years from now.

WHITHER RAY ALLEN?

## Sonics, Star at An Impasse

League sources say that the Sonics have reached an impasse in negotiations with All-Star guard Ray Allen. Seattle's final offer, made approximately two weeks ago, was a five-year extension worth $75 million. Allen responded by asking for a bonus that would increase the contract to $80 million if his production remained at 85% or more of his current level over the first three years of the deal. But the Sonics rejected that proposal, and it appears that the club will allow Allen to become a free agent this summer, when the Clippers, Hawks, Hornets and potentially the Cavaliers may compete with Seattle to sign him.

Based on his current $14.6 million salary, the maximum Allen could receive is $95 million over five years. He is willing to accept $15 million less even though he is having arguably his best season while leading Seattle (38–15 through Sunday) to a shocking 12½-game Northwest Division lead over the Timberwolves. The Sonics feel that their offer is more than generous for a 29-year-old—Steve Nash was 30 last summer when he signed his five-year, $53 million contract with the Suns—and they want to keep enough money to re-sign free agents like Vladimir Radmanovic, Antonio Daniels and Reggie Evans this summer.

**RAY TO GO?** A difference of $5 million could prompt Allen to leave the surprising Sonics.

But rival team executives suggest that Seattle is maintaining a hard line with Allen because the team is up for sale. Management has strongly denied it: "If that was true, then we wouldn't have made the offer to Ray that we did," says team president and minority owner Wally Walker. But the rumors of a sale have persisted since last summer because the Sonics have refused to re-sign G.M. Rick Sund, coach Nate McMillan or any of their seven free agents—giving any potential owner maximum flexibility. —*Ian Thomsen*

## Ian Thomsen's Fast Break

### AROUND THE RIM

Before last season G.M. **Danny Ainge** traded **Antoine Walker** *(left)* in the belief that the Celtics couldn't become a running team with him; last week Ainge reacquired Walker from the Hawks in a four-player swap. Ainge believes that Walker is more likely to take orders from **Doc Rivers** than he was from his former Boston coach, **Jim O'Brien**. While many around the league saw Ainge's change of heart as a sign of confusion, O'Brien credits him for keeping an open mind. "To me it's a sign of mature leadership," says O'Brien. . . . Here's one thing the owners and players agreed upon while meeting during All-Star weekend: They want the new collective-bargaining agreement to declare an exact luxury-tax threshold before teams begin negotiating contracts in the summer, so both the players and management will know how much money is available for free agents. . . . Surprise: Bulls coach **Scott Skiles** doesn't yell. "I can count the times I've really had to raise my voice with this group on one hand," says Skiles, who developed a reputation for being too dictatorial in his first job, at Phoenix.

### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

They were born 11 years apart, all within a mile of one another in the Lithuanian city of Kaunas: First Arvydas Sabonis, then Zydrunas Ilgauskas and now another potential NBA pivot, 7′ 3″ **Martynas Andriuskevicius** *(right)*. The 19-year-old Andriuskevicius was averaging only 9.5 minutes and 1.6 points at week's end for Zalgiris Kaunas in the Euroleague, but his U.S. agent, Herb Rudoy, predicts he'll be "a high lottery pick" and doesn't plan to pull him out of the draft as he did last year. "That combination of size and skill level you don't find very often," says one of the league's top foreign scouts. Still, he and his colleagues debate whether comparisons with Dirk Nowitzki are fair. "He's a long way away from that," the scout says. "A lot of people don't believe he'll ever be that."

### BUZZER BEATERS

3. The team with the league's best salary structure is—no surprise—the Spurs. From **Tim Duncan** ($14.3 million this year) to **Tony Parker** ($8.4 million when his new six-year contract kicks in next season) to **Manu Ginobili** ($6.6 million), every player is making a reasonable amount (at least in NBA terms).

2. While the Bucks' trades last week cleared space for them to re-sign **Michael Redd** this summer, league execs believe the moves may also signal owner **Herb Kohl**'s intention to sell the team.

1. The Warriors' risky decision to hire Stanford coach **Mike Montgomery**—a 58-year-old NBA rookie—is even more perilous now that they dealt for high-maintenance point guard **Baron Davis**.

News and Jack McCallum's analysis, every week at **SI.com/nba**.

GREG NELSON (ALLEN); KENT HORNER/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (WALKER); FABIO BOZZANI/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (ANDRIUSKEVICIUS)

# Second Acts In "Life"

*by* Rick Reilly

THIS WEEK makes it 20 years for me at this joint, and that's more fun than anybody should be allowed to have with his fingers. That's 20 years of stories on colossal events and megastars. So how come everybody wants to know what happened to the little guys?

Do you remember . . .

. . . the climber who sliced off his lower arm to get free of an 800-pound boulder? Aron Ralston says, "I'm climbing as well, if not better, than ever." His prosthetic arm is a kind of Ronco five-in-one miracle tool, which he uses to climb grade-five ice pitches and rappel down rock walls.

. . . the Polish swimmer who won gold in Athens in the 200-meter butterfly and wanted to sell the medal for charity? Otylia Jedrzejczak wound up getting $82,750 for kids with leukemia. Then Poland's state mint made her a solid gold replica.

. . . the Navy F-14 pilot Chip King, who relished making me throw up during a demonstration flight? He was the first American pilot to fly a mission over Afghanistan and now is a test pilot for Gulfstream.

. . . Jim Eubank, the 87-year-old swimmer who set five age-group world records and whipped me in a race? He died suddenly from a stroke last year in Oceanside, Calif.

. . . the poor Savanna (Ill.) High football team that lost 60 straight? It never did end its losing streak—reaching 63—before merging with two other schools' teams to form the West Carroll Thunder. Not that it helped much. The Thunder was 1–8 last season.

. . . the kid who gave up his senior season of high school football to donate a kidney to his dying grandmother? Showtime made a TV movie about Daniel Huffman's life. I'm sad to say he died in December from a shotgun blast at home in Rossville, Ill. Family members are struggling with the possibility that he took his own life.

. . . the hairball who conned NFL Hall of Famer Pete Pihos, an Alzheimer's sufferer, out of $30,000 worth of memorabilia? Shawn Stevens is serving one year in a prison in Ayer, Mass., thanks to SI's reporting and tips from memorabilia dealers. Pihos's ex-wife, Donna, got back not only most of his stuff but also almost $13,000 in donations for Pete's care.

. . . 1,072-pound Nebraska fan Patrick Deuel? He's a sliver of himself, down to 610. He took his first walk in seven years on Valentine's Day, a 30-footer with his wife, Edith.

. . . the improbable playoff-bound football team from the California School for the Deaf, in Riverside? It lost its playoff game 41–27 to Malibu High.

. . . everybody's favorite high school cross-country runner, Ben Comen, who has cerebral palsy yet refuses help when he falls five or six times a race? Next September he'll run for Presbyterian College in South Carolina and study premed.

. . . the gay high school linebacker and team captain who outed himself to teammates during the season? Corey Johnson is working on a political campaign in New York State. "I think we'll see someone, a fairly big-name athlete, come out soon," Johnson speculates.

. . . the kid who was the No. 1–rated *fifth*-grader in American hoops? Well, Kendall (Butter) Marshall is now the nation's fifth-ranked seventh-grader, according to www.hoopscooponline.com, averaging more than 30 points a game for his middle school in Dumfries, Va.

. . . Casey Martin, who ruined golf when he won the right to play the PGA Tour with a cart because of a rare circulatory disorder in his right leg? Wait, that's what golf snobs *said* would happen. It never did. Martin's career, however, is coming to an end. Asked what's working well with his game lately, Martin replied, "My cart."

> After 20 years of SI stories about colossal events and megastars, readers want to know what happened to the little guys.

. . . the blind New York Islanders fan who was taken to her first Islanders game after 30 years as a radio fan? Miriam Stone has been to three games now, courtesy of the team, but she's mad as hell at the NHL owners. "They're nothin' without the players," she says.

. . . Dion Rich, the Super Bowl sneak-in artist? Turns out my column ended his career. Cops *escorted* him into the next two Super Bowls, thus saving the NFL the embarrassment. This year, in Jacksonville, they arrested him as he tried to enter the stadium with a counterfeit ticket. (Rich says he didn't know it was a fake.) He missed his first Super Bowl since 1969, sitting in jail.

. . . the Middlebury freshmen who "pick up Butch"? The tradition continues. Butch Varno, who is 58 and has cerebral palsy, has been picked up at home and taken to and from almost every varsity football and basketball game for 44 years. Next fall Butch will be taking advanced reading classes, so he's recruiting five *female* tutors from the student body.

You go, Butch. □

If you have a comment for Rick Reilly, send it to **reilly@siletters.com**

PETER READ MILLER

MOUNTAIN DEW and MTN DEW are registered trademarks of PepsiCo, Inc.

Dear girlfriend/wife/other,

I am so, so sorry for the way I've acted the last month during the college hoops tournament. My behavior has been reprehensible, and, as you yourself pointed out, childish.

I now realize shouting at you, "Yes, my shirt stinks, but it's my lucky shirt!" is inappropriate. As is blaming you for sitting in the "wrong" chair during my team's cold shooting streaks. Not to mention, calling your best friend a dim-witted ignoramus for disagreeing with me on my proposal for a 5-point shot. And certainly, hiding the last Dew in the meat drawer of the fridge was selfish and pig-headed of me. Mea culpa.

I beg for your forgiveness. After all, you are the sun from which all the rays of happiness in my life shine. And far more important to me than most basketball games.

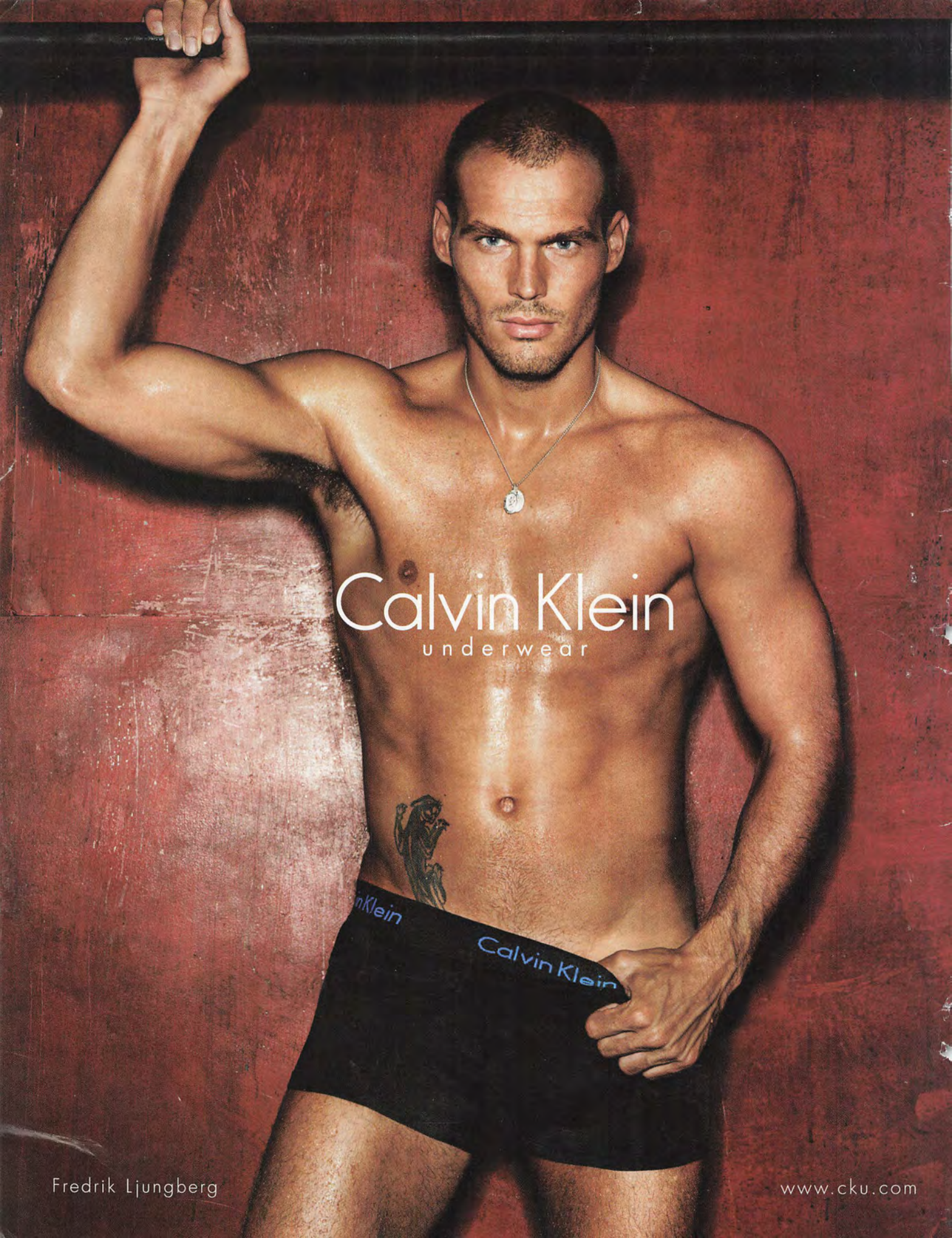
I promise to probably never get so caught up in sports again.

Yours in sorriness,

_____ "The Jerk" _____

P.S. – When I said you would have to pry the TV remote from my cold, dead hands, I was, of course, joking. I believe sharing is the very foundation of our relationship.

For other personalized letters to help you get through the big tournament go to mountaindew.com.


Calvin Klein
underwear
Calvin Klein
Fredrik Ljungberg
www.cku.com